

DEFOE, REALISM, AND THE PICARESQUE NOVEL

Ian A. Bell

Ph.D.

University of Edinburgh

Session 1980-81.



## ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with the continuing critical discussion of Defoe's fiction, and seeks the most appropriate ways of assessing his achievement. It is apparent that no general agreement has been reached about Defoe's work, and this arises from the way critics have sought for a kind of consistency throughout his work which is not to be found. The terms 'realism' and 'picaresque' are very frequently applied to Defoe's fiction, as all-encompassing critical terms. Each of these is examined, and defined ostensibly. When applied to the novels, they are found to be useful in revealing Crusoe's jeopardy, Moll's innocence, and the problems of the ending of Roxana. However, such general critical terms obscure the development within Defoe's fiction, from the thematic confusion of Crusoe to the more integrated and organised Roxana. The final aim of this study is to draw attention to the neglected features of Crusoe, Moll, and Roxana, and to re-appraise both Defoe's achievement and the various ways of describing that achievement.



### DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I have composed this thesis myself,  
and that the work is my own.

Signed..

### Errata

p. 17 n. 47 Add Toronto, 1930-34), XVL, 336.

p. 24 The numbers to notes 65 and 66 have been reversed.

p. 99 n. 3 Pierre Macherey, A Theory of Literary Production  
(1966), trans. Geoffrey Wall (London, 1978), p. 242.

p. 195 For 'the first of his works' read 'the first of his  
major fictional works'.

## CONTENTS

1. Introduction
2. Realism
3. The Picaresque Novel
4. Fortune and Providence in Robinson Crusoe
5. Moll Flanders and Comfort
6. Roxana and the Family
7. Conclusion
8. Bibliography

## INTRODUCTION

In the last twenty years, the period since the publication of Ian Watt's The Rise of the Novel, Defoe has been the subject of much serious and intense study. At least twelve single books, and a much larger number of periodical articles, have been devoted to various aspects of Defoe's fiction, and authoritative new editions of all his better-known novels have appeared since 1969. In offering yet another such study, I take as my rubric the following words from a Times Literary Supplement review:

After many years of scholarly and critical attention, Defoe remains an enigma... Was he a mere venal time-server? Was he a man whose convictions changed with the political weather? Was his religion mere bourgeois rationalization? Was he so subtle that it is a mistake to impute subtlety to him? Or was the author of Robinson Crusoe and Moll Flanders far more ironical, far more conscious of the double-edged sword he brandished over a corrupt society than his readers took him to be? Or - best of all - was he unconscious of his penetrative powers, serving up helpings of middle-class apologetics, all unaware that he was delineating the grim economic imperatives of the world he represented so well that he could not recognise his own (or any one else's) role in it? 1

The questions raised here remain to be answered. It will not be my enterprise to answer all of them. Rather, I want to investigate certain ideas about Defoe's fiction which may, in turn, illuminate some of these murky areas. There are indeed some fundamental questions about Defoe which demand an answer. In the words of a recent editor of Robinson Crusoe, 'It is still impossible to say that critics and literary historians have satisfactorily resolved the central questions of Defoe's basic sincerity, exact intentions and achievement in the book.'<sup>2</sup>

- 
1. Review of James Sutherland, Daniel Defoe (1971), TLS, 28th April, 1973.
  2. Daniel Defoe, The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner, ed. J. Donald Crowley (London and Oxford, 1972), p. viii. All later references to the text will be to this edition, hereinafter referred to as Crusoe.

Though such questions may not be wholly answerable, they are central to any just estimate of Defoe as a novelist, and in the ensuing pages I will attempt to find a way to offer such an estimate.

Perhaps the most obvious enigma about Defoe is his unconventionality. For one thing, he must be the most incredibly prolific author our literature has known, with well over five hundred authenticated titles to his name. However, one noted scholar has detected 'an inner consistency of purpose'<sup>3</sup> throughout the canon, and even the normally unsympathetic Dr. Johnson allowed that Defoe 'had written so variously and so well'.<sup>4</sup> One of my aims in this study will be to show that there is confusion not only in the estimates of Defoe, but within the works of Defoe themselves. I do not detect any 'inner consistency', and I want to emphasise the variety, even the contradictions, within given works. My estimate of Defoe's fiction, as will be seen, is that he was a writer lacking clarity of vision, lacking careful intellectual precision, but possessing a fascinating spiritual and literary confusion.

Defoe's contemporaries were in little doubt about his status. One early commentator simply described him as 'a loathsome Thing, shap'd like a Toad'.<sup>5</sup> Distaste for Defoe's character is equally obvious in the comments made by the Scriblerians. Swift claimed Defoe was 'so grave, sententious, dogmatic a Rogue, that there is no enduring him'.<sup>6</sup> Gay claimed that Defoe 'will endure but one Skimming'.<sup>7</sup> And probably most damagingly, Pope assigned a place in The Dunciad to Defoe, even if he did accept that 'there's something good in all he has writ'.<sup>8</sup> The most frequent contemporary criticism of Defoe was that he lacked learning, and that consequently he had no right to engage in the profession of letters. This sneer seems to have aroused Defoe to some kind of action, for we know he issued a challenge through the

---

3. John Robert Moore, Daniel Defoe: Citizen of the Modern World (Chicago and London, 1958), p.vii.

4. James Boswell, The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D., ed. R.W.Chapman and C.B.Tinker (London, 1953), p.928.

5. The Fable of the Cuckoo (1701), quoted in Pat Rogers (ed.), Defoe: The Critical Heritage (London and Boston, 1972), p.10.

6. A Letter Concerning the Sacramental Test, quoted in Rogers, op. cit., p.38.

7. The Present State of Wit (1711), quoted in Rogers, op.cit., p.39.

8. Joseph Spence, Observations, Anecdotes, and Characters of Books and Men, quoted in Rogers, op.cit., p.40.

The Review, defying his opponents to translate the modern languages as well as he could. Since there was to be a stake of £20, it seems fair to suggest that Defoe must have been confident of victory.<sup>9</sup> Later, he was to defend himself against any further charges by casting aspersions on the value of polite learning. According to this passage, Defoe saw knowledge of the world, and of the 'mother tongue' as being more important than scholarship:

I know a Man at this Time a Minister, he is a Critick in the Greek and Hebrew, a Compleat Master of the Latin - Yet it would make a man blush to read a Letter from him, sleep to hear him Preach, and sick to read his Books - He is a Master of Languages, and buried in Letters, but cannot spell his Mother Tongue, knows nothing of the World, and has never look'd abroad - Such learning I confess, I despise; and covet to be Illiterate rather than thus a Scholar. 10.

There may certainly be a trace of petulance in this passage, but the fact remains that Defoe's difference from his contemporaries, and his rejection of their standards, will present problems to the critic who tries to see Defoe in the terms of erudition and sophistication advocated by Pope, Swift and Gay.

Another characteristic problem is revealed by this 1710 defence of Defoe's standards, presented anonymously:

I have often observed, both in Prose and Verse, that some Persons of strong Genius, well acquainted with the World, and but of little Learning, have made a better Figure in some kinds of Writings, than Persons of the most consummate Literature, not blessed with Natural Genius, and a Knowledge of Mankind.

The preference of Genius to Learning is sufficiently demonstrated in the Writings of the Author of The True Born English Man... This Author is characteriz'd as a Person of little Learning, but of prodigious Natural Parts; and the immortal Shakespeare had but a small share of Literature. 11.

The argument here agrees in substance with that in the passage quoted directly

---

9. The Review, 31st May, 1705 (11, 150b).

10. The Review, 16th December, 1710 (VII, 455a).

11. A Vindication of the Press (1718), ed. O.C. Williams, Augustan Reprint Society, No.29, 1951 (Los Angeles, 1951), pp.29-30.



above, and the difficulty does not lie in its appreciation. What makes this such an interesting passage is that its implied comparison of 'the Author of The True Born English Man' and Shakespeare was not made by an independent assessor, but by 'the Author of the True Born Englishman' himself; that is, by Defoe. Defoe saw the more learned craftsmen, like the Scriblerians, as having departed from the true course of literature. That is to say, he saw literature, not as the display of erudition, but as the expression of 'Natural Genius'. Now, I do not want to make out that Defoe is the earliest of the Romantics - anyone less aethereal and spontaneous would be hard to imagine! However, this passage, unethically anonymous, reminds us again that Defoe saw himself as rather different from his contemporaries, as trying something different from them. Defoe was departing from the neo-classical, or simply the learned standards of his contemporaries, and was trying to convey something simpler, something which required little learning to understand.

One of the things which may have aroused the animosity of Pope, Swift and Gay, and which has been largely forgotten now, was that Defoe the poet was an enormously popular and influential figure in his day. His poems have not survived nearly as well as his prose. To the modern reader, they seem forced, hurried, and largely uninspired, revealing a facility for rhyming, without genuine talent. However, in the earlier part of the eighteenth century, it seems as though the poems produced by Defoe were amongst the most popular of all. It is significant that the first compilation of Defoe's work should be entitled A True Collection of the Writings of the Author of the True Born Englishman.<sup>12</sup> Also, Defoe tried to promote the sales of seventeen other pamphlets and poems, prior to 1707, by signing them in this way. Certainly, The True Born Englishman is by far the liveliest of his poems, and its racy onslaught can still be appreciated.<sup>13</sup> For its first readers, it seems to have had the power of a great and important work. In The Vindication of the Press (1718), without revealing himself to be the author, Defoe says that his poem 'has Sold beyond the best Performance of any Ancient or Modern Poet of the

---

12. Two volumes, London, 1703, 1704.

13. This is the only poem of Defoe's which has managed to creep into modern collections like The Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse (Oxford, 1926).

greatest Excellency, and perhaps beyond any Poetry ever printed in the English Language.<sup>14</sup> Elsewhere, Defoe claimed that, over and above the authorised editions, broadsheets were sold 'in the Streets', and eighty thousand copies were sold.<sup>15</sup> It is typical of the reader's relationship with Defoe, that he should feel obliged to check these figures. However, from what we can reconstruct, these astonishing sales seem possible. The poem was originally published in 1700, and as late as 1749 was still selling well - a twenty-fifth edition was published in Dublin in that year.<sup>16</sup> None of Defoe's other poems came close to this in terms of sales, but it is true to say that his reputation amongst his contemporaries depends on his economic success as a poet - a fact which is now largely ignored.

All I wish to point out about Defoe's poems is their explicitly occasional genesis. That is to say, the poems Defoe offered to the public were contributions to current debate, versified in simple, vigorous couplets. Both The True Born Englishman (1700) and Ye True Born Englishmen Proceed (1701) were significant contributions to the current debate about racial purity and the issues of sovereignty which arose from it. Defoe's poems were replies to a xenophobic poem by John Tutchin, The Foreigners (1700), and, in turn, Defoe was attacked in many poems, such as the anonymous The True-Born Hugonot (1703), containing the lines:

A true Malignant, Arrogant and Sour,  
And ever Snarling at Establish'd Power... 17

Defoe's early reputation then was that of a controversialist. However, what I want to emphasise is that he was unorthodox ('Snarling at Establish'd Power') and successful. I do not mean that he was successful in the achievement of his larger aims, but that he was successful in gaining a hearing. One of the most interesting features of the publishing history of his poetry is that not only were many of

---

14. Augustan Reprint Society edition, supra, p.29.

15. True Collection, Preface to the Second Volume (sig.A3<sup>r</sup>).

16. Information about the sales of Defoe's poems can be found in D.F. Foxon, English Verse 1700-1750 (2 vols., Cambridge, 1975). See numbers A49, A126, D89-D185, C176, C324, D1, etc.

17. Quoted in Rogers, op.cit., p.34.

the poems successful enough to be pirated, there were also a large number of poems which purported to be 'by the author of The True Born Englishman', with which Defoe had no connection. This type of abuse led Defoe to write:

The Mob of wretched Writers stand  
With Storms of Wit in every Hand,  
They bait my Memr'y in the Street,  
And charge me with the Credit of their Wit. 18

For this type of imitation to be undertaken, Defoe, under the pseudonym of 'the author of The True born Englishman', must have been an interesting and controversial figure. As we see the typical mercantile or financial image used in the extract above, we can see that Defoe the tradesman was, for a time, a seller of verses.

It was during this period of popularity that Defoe seriously misjudged the sophistication of his readers, and ended up in the pillory. As is well known, The Shortest Way with Dissenters was meant as a hoax,<sup>19</sup> but was taken as sincere, straight-faced advocacy of a very extreme position. As a result, Defoe was arraigned, and stood in the pillory in 1702. After this blunder, his attempts at controversy in public debate took more reasoned pamphlet form, and avoided the vituperative attack of his earlier poems. After 1702, Defoe's tone became that of a man appealing to good sense, stirred into writing only because of the flagrant abuse of good principles. Representative of this is his plea, 'I Hope the Time has come at last, when the Voice of moderate Principles may be heard.'<sup>20</sup> Though his comments may have become less inflammatory, his voice was still heeded. For instance, on 6th October, 1711, he published a brief pamphlet entitled Reasons why this nation ought to put a speedy end to this expensive war. The proposals must have attracted readers, for there is a third edition of this pamphlet recorded on 18th October, 1711. On 30th October, he seems to have had second thoughts, for he then produced a pamphlet called Armageddon: or the necessity for carrying on the war if such peace cannot be obtained

- 
18. From Elegy on the Author of the True Born Englishman, True Collection, II, 70. See also Foxon, op.cit., S442.6, L162, L238, N132, T513. Defoe writes at length about one such spurious attribution in The Review, April 4, 1704.
  19. There has been some controversy concerning the best description of The Shortest Way. See the summary of and contribution to this debate by Paul K. Alkon, 'Defoe's Argument in The Shortest Way with Dissenters,' MP, LXXIII (1976), S12-S23.
  20. An Appeal to Honour and Justice (1715), in Selected Writings of Daniel Defoe, ed. James T. Boulton (Cambridge, 1975), p.166. Defoe's remarks here are strongly influenced by his association with Robert Harley. See J.A. Downie, Robert Harley and the Press (Cambridge, 1979).



as may render Europe safe, and trade secure. This too seems to have caught public attention, for again there is a third edition recorded by the end of the year. Since the titles would seem to indicate a complete reversal of opinion in the space of only twenty-four days, how are we to explain Defoe's behaviour? The most charitable suggestion would be to say that what we see here is 'the versatility of Defoe', as well as his 'great industry'.<sup>21</sup> However, Defoe's behaviour appears more shifty than that. Since both pamphlets were issued anonymously, and the public would probably have been unaware that Defoe was the author of both, it seems fair to suggest that Defoe was concerned with getting a hearing, largely irrespective of what he actually said, although the demands of his patrons must also be considered.<sup>22</sup>

Defoe's other more popular works were equally conducive to debate, while avoiding the explicitly and dangerously provocative. His famous pamphlet, A true relation of the apparition of one Mrs. Veal (1705), went through twenty editions before the end of the century, and has appeared regularly ever since. An equally occasional, journalistic piece, A narrative of all the robberies, escapes, etc. of John Sheppard sold eight editions within its year of publication, 1724. It seems then that Defoe's later work shows a lack of controversy - as though he avoided the more heated areas, and was rewarded by success for doing so. Certainly, much of his later work was more didactic than controversial, and more ruminative than vituperative. Under the pseudonym of 'Andrew Moreton Esq.', Defoe presented a number of works on various moral issues, such as the treatment of servants, of children and home management.<sup>23</sup> In the varied works under this heading, the reader is guided on a number of matters, and the surprising thing about the books is their prolonged success. Religious Courtship tells the interested reader the proper way to achieve betrothal, and the book achieved a sale of twenty-one editions between 1722 and 1789. Even more popular, however, was the most impressive of these books, The Family Instructor. First published in 1715, this had reached its

---

21. William Lee, Daniel Defoe: His Life and Recently Discovered Writings (London, 1869), III, 480.

22. On this point of anonymity, it is worth noting that only two pieces after 1710 actually carried Defoe's name. See John Robert Moore, Defoe in the Pillory and Other Studies (Bloomington, 1939), p.134.

23. The use of <sup>the</sup> 'Moreton' pseudonym gives an interesting illustration of publishing practice in the early eighteenth century. The

8.

fifteenth edition of 1761, and its nineteenth by 1809, indicating a prolonged and steady, if unspectacular, sale. It was, we are told, 'a great favourite for school prizes,'<sup>24</sup> and was translated into Welsh in 1818. In 1825 the Religious Tract Society of London obviously saw it as a weapon of some potency, and issued a portion, entitled The Two Apprentices, to convert the metropolis. As one commentator puts it, The Family Instructor was 'close neighbour to the family Bible in the parlours of the devout.'<sup>25</sup> The comparison with The Pilgrim's Progress, in both intention and popularity, is obvious and significant. Notice how far we have come from the figure of Defoe 'ever Snarling at Establish'd Power'.

- 
23. ~~of publishing practices in the early eighteenth century.~~ The name first appears on a 1725 tract, Every-Body's Business is No-Body's Business. This seems to have been a successful publication, for the first edition is dated 3rd June 1725, and the fifth edition is 22nd July 1725. In 1726 Defoe published The Protestant Monastery, ascribed to Moreton 'Author of Every-Body's Business is No-Body's Business'. This seems an obvious attempt to cash in on the popularity of the earlier work, and an attempt to create a character for Moreton as moral arbiter. In this case, the attempt to improve sales was not successful, and another method of ingratiation was attempted in 1730, when much of the discursive part of the book was cut, the sensational aspects expanded, and the whole retitled Chickens Feed Capons. This new work provoked controversy (see Moore, Checklist, pp.225-226), but the Moreton pseudonym returned again in 1727, affixed to Parochial Tyranny, a tract about the abuse of charity and the poor plight of parishioners. Moreton is also credited with Second Thoughts are Best (1728), about the prevention of street robberies, and there is an unnumbered leaf at the back of this book advertising Every-Body's Business, The Protestant Monastery, and Augusta Triumphans, an anonymous work of 1728, as 'Books written by Andrew Moreton, Esq.' (see Moore, Checklist, p.219). This type of post-ascription also applies to A System of Magic, published without signature in 1726, which bore the name of Moreton in later editions, such as that of 21st January 1730. In each of these Defoe appears more as entrepreneur than as artist, arranging the most favourable conditions for the sale of his work. If 'Andrew Moreton, Esq.' sells books, then he should be encouraged to adopt other titles. The customer is always right.
24. W.Wilson, Memoirs of the Life and Times of Daniel Defoe (London 1830) III, 480.
25. G.D.H. Cole, Persons and Periods (London. 1938), p.12. See also the 1792 reference to a book becoming 'as much a Standard book in this Country as Robinson Crusoe & the Pilgrim's Progress.' Quoted in E.P.Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (1963, Penguin ed., rev., Harmondsworth, 1968), p. 118.

One thing we can be fairly certain of is that Defoe would have been pleased by the endurance of these works, for he enjoyed presenting himself as the just, unprejudiced chronicler of his age. In his A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain (1724), he gives us this ringing declaration of purpose:

I intended once to have gone due west this journey; but then I should have been to crowd my observations so close...as to have made my letter too long, or my observations too light and superficial, as others have done before me.

. . . .

I shall sing you no songs here of the river in the first person of a water nymph, a goddess, (and I know not what) according to the humour of the ancient poets. I shall talk nothing of the marriage of old Isis, the male river with the beautiful Thame, the female river, a whimsey as simple as the subject was empty, but I shall speak of the river as occasion presents, as it really is made glorious by the splendour of its shores, gilded with noble palaces, strong fortifications, large hospitals, and publick buildings. 26

Defoe here is rejecting 'whimsy', that is the fanciful interpretation of the landscape, in favour of a factual tribute to the social and economic conditions of his day. Once again, as in his poems, we become interested by the occasion of his remarks, by the issues of the day, rather than by representations of classical truths. Defoe's Tour is in many respects the first example of the modern mind exploring the geographical world - that is Defoe interprets the landscape in economic terms, rather than moral terms. Now that the earlier tour of Macky has been largely forgotten, Defoe's Tour remains as a source for historians of his time. Take, for example, this piece of whimsy from G.M.Trevelyan:

When a survey is demanded of Queen Anne's island, of its everyday life far distant from the Mall, and yet farther from the sound of war, our thoughts turn to Daniel

---

26. Daniel Defoe, A Tour through the Whole Island of Britain, ed. G.H.D.Cole and D.C.Browning (1962, rev.ed., London, 1974) pp. 173-174.

Defoe, riding solitary on that very quest...like Cobbett who rode and wrote about England a hundred years after him, he was a realist and a man of the people, but he was not, like his successor, half blinded by rage against the powers that be. For the age of Queen Anne was the prelude to a long age of content, and Defoe, more than Swift, was the typical man of his day. 27.

Though we <sup>may</sup> have grave reservations about calling the extraordinary Defoe 'the typical man of his day', Trevelyan's main point is an interesting one. He suggests that Defoe is in some way in touch with the common people, while at the same time being content with the authorities. Again, the interpretation of Defoe's later work has led to a view of him completely different from that held by his contemporaries.<sup>28.</sup> Such a view reveals the amount of ambiguity, uncertainty, and downright contradiction that can be found in the estimates of Defoe the journalist. On the one hand we have his immensely popular poetry derided, and on the other we have his neglected journalism praised by modern commentators. If such diversity exists in estimates of his non-fiction, there is need for great caution when approaching his fiction.

The great differences we have seen have been differences about the intent of Defoe's work, and about its value. Is there then any general scheme within which we can accommodate Defoe's fiction? Though opinions differ about Defoe's intent as a journalist, both the antagonistic contemporaries and the eulogistic historians claim that consistency of a kind is recognisable. Is there the same consistency throughout the fiction? Certainly some historians have moved without difficulty from the non-fiction to the fiction, describing both in the same terms. Here is Trevelyan again:.

He first perfected the art of the reporter; even his novels are imaginary 'reports' of daily life, whether on a desert island, or in a thief's den. 29

---

27. G.M.Trevelyan, England under Queen Anne (London, New York and Toronto, 1930), I, 2. See also similar statements in M.Ashley, England in the Seventeenth Century, and M.D.George, England in Transition or London Life in the Eighteenth Century, *passim*.

28. It is worth noting here that Defoe's near contemporaries did not see the Tour in this way, and eighteenth century editors, including Richardson subjected it to 'dreadful mutilations'. See Wilson, Memoirs, III, 534.

29. Trevelyan, ibid.



Another commentator, to whom I have already referred, asserts baldly that 'there is no difference between Defoe the reporter and Defoe the novelist.'<sup>30</sup>

This assertion, made by many others as well as Trevelyan and Cole, assumes a uniformity of intention throughout the Defoe canon. Such an assumption has significant consequences. If it is suggested that the only difference between the fiction and the non-fiction is simply the falsity of the details in the former (however skilfully portrayed), then Defoe becomes tainted with the deliberate intention to deceive his readers - to cause them to mistake falsity for truth. In short, Defoe as a writer of fiction simply tells lies. This is a surprisingly common view, and, interestingly, it began to be promulgated at least eighteen years before Defoe produced any of his novels. For instance, one anonymous pamphleteer of 1701 described Defoe's work rather entertainingly as a 'Fardle of Falsities'.<sup>31</sup> A better known example, which also appeared before the novels did, is the remark in Read's Journal describing 'the little Art he is truly master of, of forging a Story, and imposing it on the world for Truth.'<sup>32</sup>

Though these early accusations are consistent with the sneers of Pope, Swift and Gay referred to earlier, the main force of this attack does not appear until the late nineteenth century. As we know already, there were two major nineteenth century biographies of Defoe, which have almost nothing but praise for him - firstly Wilson's biography of 1830, and secondly Lee's of 1869. However, much more influential than either of these was a shorter book, published in 1879, by William Minto. Minto fails to be captivated by Defoe, whom he characterises as 'shifty'.<sup>33</sup> Minto's estimate is never flattering and rarely kind. His general view is that Defoe is no more than an unscrupulous observer, purveying fiction under the guise of fact:

---

30. Cole, op.cit., p.3.

31. England's Enemies Expos'd (1701), quoted by Rogers, op.cit., p.11.

32. Read's Journal, 1st November, 1718; quoted by Lee, Life, I, 282.

33. William Minto, Daniel Defoe (London, 1879), p.157.

Defoe was essentially a journalist... Defoe always wrote what a large number of people were in a mood to read. All his writings, with so few exceptions that they may reasonably be supposed to fall into that category, were Pièces de Circonstance... From writing biographies with real names attached to them, it was but a short step to writing biographies with fictitious names. 34.

If all Minto is saying is that the novels are based on fact, that they are occasional, then his remarks are innocuous. We have seen the way Defoe's poems took their initiative directly from events in politics or literature, and examples of the same process can be found elsewhere in Defoe's work. It is obvious that most of the controversial pamphlets were occasional - Pièces de Circonstance, if you like - and other works are equally so. We are told, for example, that the occasion for the composition of Mrs. Veal was that it might serve as a promotional piece for Drelincourt's Consolations against the Fear of Death.<sup>35</sup> It is also possible to see even Robinson Crusoe as Defoe's contribution to contemporary discussion about the state of nature; to see Captain Singleton related to discussions of piracy; Colonel Jack related to the treatment of orphans and of slaves; even to see Moll Flanders as only one amongst many contemporary tracts of criminal life. It is also interesting, though it may be no more than a coincidence, that the convincing treatment of prostitution's squalor in Roxana should be presented in the same year as Defoe's old adversary Bernard Mandeville offered a defence of whoring in his A modest defence of public stews (1724).<sup>36</sup>

However, Minto is doing more than simply speculating on the genesis of the novels. He is also claiming that they only have the status, and the interest of spurious biographies, and so he is putting limitations on their form and theme. One obvious difficulty in this position is that the more popular of the criminal biographies - the

---

34. Minto, op.cit., pp. 134, 137.

35. See Wilson, Memoirs, II, 408.

36. Defoe's views on prostitution can also be found in Some Considerations upon Street-Walkers (1726). See also Maximillian E. Novak, Economics and the Fiction of Defoe. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1962), p. 98, and Lee, Life, III, 289-291.

genuine ones like John Sheppard and Jonathan Wild - were published in 1724 and 1725 respectively. That is to say, Defoe wrote genuine biographies after the fake ones, and not as Minto suggests.<sup>37</sup> However, it is true that Defoe did try his hand at genuine biography of a kind before he published his novels. There were the Memoirs of John, Duke of Melfort (1714), Memoirs of the Church of Scotland (1717), and The Life and Adventures of Mr. Duncan Campbell (1720). It is also worth pointing out that the better-known novels were not Defoe's first efforts at pseudo-memoir. In 1713, there was The Second-Sighted Highlander, which purported to be autobiography; and in 1715 there was the Memoirs of the Conduct of Her Late Majesty and Her Late Ministry, supposedly written by 'the Right Honourable the Countess of ---'. What Minto is suggesting, then, is that when Defoe ran out of genuine subjects for biography, a form which had proved itself popular, he had no compunction in simply inventing new ones. Sometimes he went further and presented fake autobiographies, imposed them on the world for genuine, and presumably laughed all the way to the bank.

Minto's views are expanded by another nineteenth-century critic, Leslie Stephen, who says;

He cannot be understood unless we remember that he was primarily and essentially a journalist, and that even his novels are part of his journalism. 38

Stephen goes further than Minto in analysing Defoe's creative process, and he reads all the novels as being carefully calculated, premeditated frauds. Stephen unwittingly damages his argument by taking as his paramount case of Defoe's deception the pamphlet account of Mrs. Veal, which contemporary newspaper accounts reveal to be a genuine piece of reportage. Even so Stephen's conclusion remains that:

... he had the most marvellous power ever known of giving verisimilitude to his fictions; or in other words again, he had the most amazing talent on record for telling lies. 39.

---

37. See Arthur W. Secord, Studies in the Narrative Method of Defoe (Illinois 1924), pp. 15-16.

38. Leslie Stephen, Hours in a Library (new ed., with additions, London, 1892), I, 40.

39. Stephen, op.cit., I, 4.

It is important to decide what is involved in calling Defoe a journalist. Though it has often been said that Defoe is, in the modern sense of the word, a reporter,<sup>40</sup> his journalism is essentially of a different kind. The Review, which Defoe organised and wrote single-handed from 1704 to 1713, is of the same general form as the later, better-known productions of Addison and Steele. Though Defoe lacks the stylistic resources of these writers, his work consists in writing a discursive type of journalism such as can be found in The Spectator or The Englishman. For each issue of The Review, Defoe produced an essay of around a thousand words, on some aspects of economics or trade, illustrated by contemporary events. It now appears that Defoe was a more moderate, less strident writer than his colleagues - John Tutchin with the Whig Observer and Charles Leslie with the high-flying Rehearsal. In retrospect, Defoe seems considerably less partisan than these two, and more open to general considerations. It is important to notice, however, that, unlike modern journalism, Defoe's periodical work was reflective rather than immediately descriptive. That is, Defoe was rarely concerned with precise mimetic fidelity to specific events. His journalism rather concerned itself with discussion of events than with a recreation of them.<sup>41</sup> Stephen talks of journalism in terms of 'verisimilitude', yet that was not, in fact, a major concern of Defoe the journalist. Defoe was not a newsgatherer, neither in the factual journalism nor in the fictitious novels. The view of Minto and Stephen that Defoe was always and only a provider of facts (which were sometimes downright lies) is inconsistent with the practice we have seen, and amounts to a complete denial of Defoe's integrity and merit as a writer of both journalism and creative fiction.

The Minto and Stephen approach has been surprisingly successful. Stephen was the author of the piece on Defoe in the Dictionary of National

---

40. 'Defoe belonged to - it might also be said, established - the legman tradition in reporting.' D. Goldknopf, The Life of the Novel (Chicago and London, 1972), p.47.

41. Reference may also be made here to Defoe's contributions to Mist's Journal et al. (see Life, III, passim). Though the range of subjects covered is here much wider, Defoe avoids the kind of precise enumeration of events he is normally thought to have offered.



Biography and his disparaging remarks there (actually given as a kind of faint praise) became almost received opinion for a great length of time. For example, F.R. Leavis credits Stephen with having said 'all that need be said about him (Defoe) as a novelist'.<sup>42</sup> To the same end, Q.D. Leavis argues that Defoe is not a writer of importance:

Defoe, having spent a lifetime in every kind of hack work and being finally discredited as a political writer, with both parties, at the age of fifty-nine turned, or rather, luckily drifted into prose fiction to support himself...Defoe concentrated on literary devices which actually precluded the creation of a work of art...To us, his journalistic arts seem childish cunning, transparent and spasmodic. 43

According to this, everything seems to have conspired against Defoe becoming a novelist of significance - devoid of personality to express, he used his spasmodic childish cunning to try to deceive his readers. Neither Stephen nor the Leavises are taken in. Now, it is true that Defoe may not have been the most scrupulous or reputable character our literature affords. His business deals look very suspect, and he was apt to let his patron rule his pen, then whine when misunderstood.<sup>44</sup> However, I want to suggest that it is possible to separate the assessment of Defoe's fiction from any consideration of his personality or his behaviour as a journalist. If this can be done, the evidence supporting Stephen, Minto and the Leavises is rendered invalid, and our estimate of Defoe will be based, as it ought in any case to be based, on a close reading of the texts themselves, and on our understanding of Defoe's period.

I have already mentioned the contemporary reaction to Defoe's controversial pamphlets. To see if it is possible to remove Defoe's

42. F.R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (1948, new ed., London, 1960). p.2n. Defoe's omission from the great tradition at least puts him in good company. Also out in the cold are Richardson, Fielding, Sterne and Smollett. The footnote in which Defoe is dismissed also discards Sterne for 'irresponsible (and nasty) trifling'.
43. Q.D. Leavis, Fiction and the Reading Public (London, 1932), pp.102/3
44. Defoe's businesses are chronicled by Moore, and by Sutherland in their biographies. For Defoe's whining, see An Appeal to Honour and Justice (1715). See also the account of his pamphleteering activities in J.A. Downie, op.cit..

fiction from the rest of his work, it is worth looking at contemporary responses to these novels. Before the publication of Crusoe in 1719, only two of Defoe's pieces had been translated. The two great questions consider'd and its sequel The two great questions further consider'd, both initially published in London in 1700, were translated into French and published in France in 1701. This is not, in fact, a very surprising event. These pamphlets deal with 'the French question', and show us only that the controversy was being listened to on both sides of the channel. However, after 1720, Defoe's works achieved much wider European circulation. The three parts of Crusoe became available in French, Dutch and German by 1722, and the first two parts were translated into Italian in 1734, and into Danish in 1745. The book also had the distinction of being banned by the Inquisition in 1756. In Germany alone, the first half of the eighteenth-century saw translations of Duncan Campbell, Moll Flanders (two separate versions), Colonel Jack, Roxana, The History of the Pirates, The Political History of the Devil, and Conjugal Lewdness. Altogether, there were twenty-seven separate foreign translations of various works before Defoe's death in 1731, and a total of fifty by the end of the century.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the five languages mentioned had been joined by such curiosities as Catalan, Welsh, and Persian. The great influence of Crusoe on the Continent can be seen in the genre known as the robinsonade. The influence was of such strength in Germany that a 1726 translation of Le Sage's Gil Blas was called Der spanische Robinson.<sup>45</sup> Since the popularity of Defoe's fiction reached such heights abroad, where Defoe's personality was not an issue, then there is no reason why his fiction cannot be seen as a separate canon, untainted by any extraneous considerations of his personality or his journalism. The fact that so few of the translations were made of his non-fiction suggests that there is a specific type of interest satisfied by the fiction, and not engaged by the journalism.

It is immediately striking that, apart from the uncritical Wilson and Lee, Defoe's admirers have been very selective indeed in bestowing their praise. Coleridge, for example, could write 'Worthy of Shakespeare!' in the margin of Crusoe; but all he was referring to

---

<sup>45</sup> P.B.Gove, The Imaginary Voyage in Prose Fiction (London, 1964), p.124

is a particularly fine, though dubious, piece of punctuation.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Hazlitt got so excited by The Shortest Way with Dissenters that he called it 'one of the truest, ablest and most seasonable pamphlets ever published'. However, he was unmoved by the story of Captain Singleton, whom he described as 'a hardened, brutal desperado, without one redeeming trait, or almost human feeling'. Later he became even more harsh, saying 'Moll Flanders is utterly vile and detestable'.<sup>47</sup> This last work, even Sir Walter Scott, who was usually enthusiastic over Defoe, thought 'calculated to do an infinite deal of mischief among the lower classes'.<sup>48</sup> In more recent times, Virginia Woolf lavished praise on Crusoe,<sup>49</sup> and E.M.Forster came out strongly on the side of Moll.<sup>50</sup> In each case, the other five hundred and fifty (or so) works were completely ignored. Crusoe, at least has never lacked admirers. Dr. Johnson listed it with Don Quixote and The Pilgrim's Progress as one of the only three works 'that was wished longer by its readers'.<sup>51</sup> Karl Marx analysed it in the opening pages of Das Kapital, perhaps in too caustic a way to include him as 'admirer' of the book, but still with care and attention.

Crusoe has now become part of common knowledge, and it is one of the most widely read books within Western culture. As such the kinds of interest it has engaged have varied enormously - from Gabriel Betteredge in The Moonstone consulting it as an oracle, to Walter De La Mare philosophising gently in its wake.<sup>53</sup> Much of the interest may safely be called non-literary, and even literary critics can come up with some extremely surprising conclusions. For example, an eminent French critic has discovered autobiography within its pages:

L'amour de Robinson pour la culture  
nous rappellera les travaux de jardinage  
de De Foe à Stoke Newington. 54

Elsewhere, a more sociological critic values the book because of the presence of Friday, who, he tells us, is 'the one darky whom we shall never cease to love'.<sup>55</sup>

- 
- 46. T.M.Raysor (ed.), Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism (London 1936), p.294
  - 47. P.P.Howe, (Ed.), The Complete Works of William Hazlitt (London and
  - 48. Sir Walter Scott, Miscellaneous Prose Works (Edinburgh, 1847), I, 401
  - 49. Virginia Woolf, The Common Reader (new ed., London, 1929) pp.121-132
  - 50. E.M.Forster, Aspects of the Novel (1927), ed.Oliver Stallybrass (London, 1974), pp.39-44, 1224.
  - 51. J.E.Brown (ed.), The Critical Opinions of Samuel Johnson (New York, 1961), p.3
  - 52. J.J.Rousseau, Emile, ou De L'éducation (1762), ed. F. & P. Richard (Paris, 1954), pp. 210-1.
  - 53. Walter De La Mare, Desert Islands and Robinson Crusoe (London, 1930)
  - 54. Paul Dottin, Daniel DeFoe et Ses Romans (Paris, 1924), p.295. To be fair, Defoe himself hints at autobiographical intent in the preface to the Serious Reflections of Robinson Crusoe.
  - 55. C.B.A.Proper, Social Elements in English Prose Fiction (Amsterdam, 1929) p.

However, if we ignore such silliness and leave aside for the moment the dissenting voices of Charles Gildon and Lord Macaulay, we can see the perennial interest aroused by Crusoe as a phenomenon unrelated to any estimate of Defoe's character. That is, Defoe's fiction is not interesting simply because it is Defoe's. Consequently, it can be the subject of independent inquiry, and can be removed, as it were, from the Defoe canon. Even Defoe's contemporaries saw Crusoe as independent of the rest of Defoe, and the book was treated as a singular piece. It is significant that though there were many pamphlets and poems issued as by 'the author of the True Born Englishman', there were none (other than the two direct sequels) offered as by 'the author of Robinson Crusoe'.

Crusoe has been the subject of much serious critical discussion as well as of the frivolities mentioned above. Largely, the issue which leads to division is this - was Defoe genuinely aware of the value of his fiction, and was it the product of definite design? Or was it simply another piece of journalistic opportunism, flattering the expectations of its audience, which achieved value by its unconscious embodiment of the values of this audience? Most of the recent discussion has been centred around, or even directly provoked by, the remarks of Ian Watt in his The Rise of the Novel (1957). Watt concludes that it is a mistake to impute conscious artistry to Defoe. He sees Defoe's significance as lying in his unconscious presentation of the forces at work in the early part of the eighteenth century, forces of rising individualism, revealing the rise of bourgeois culture and middle-class values. This middle-class readership, now capable of purchasing and reading fiction, Defoe both described and represented. As such, Defoe's significance becomes as much technical as thematic, in that he had to evolve some form within which his new ideas could be appreciated. Watt puts it like this:

It would seem, then, that Defoe's importance in the history of the novel is directly connected with the way his narrative structure embodied the struggle between Puritanism and the tendency to secularization which was rooted in material progress. At the same time, it is also apparent that the secular and economic viewpoint is the dominant partner, and that it is this which explains why it is Defoe rather than Bunyan, who is usually considered to be the first key figure in the rise of the novel. 56.

---

56. Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel (1957, Penguin ed., Harmondsworth, 1963), p.86. All further references will be to this edition, hereinafter cited as Rise, and will be incorporated in the text.



Watt stresses two main things about Defoe - his newness, and his lack of self-consciousness about his fiction. In fact, Defoe is important simply because he was not aware of what he was doing, because he unwittingly showed us the limitations of the economic world-view as well as its strengths. Defoe, then, becomes the subject of primarily historical study, and his fiction remains only as a historical or economic document, too partial to survive as living and impressive literature. In effect, Watt finds himself in agreement with the nineteenth-century critic who said that Defoe's characters 'still want something - the snap of the fingers of the artist'.<sup>57</sup> Watt also shares the reservations of Minto, Stephen and the Leavises about the limitations of Defoe's moral perceptiveness. Concerning Moll Flanders, he talks of 'the moral imperceptiveness which is so laughably clear to us', and this he attributes to 'one of the psychological characteristics of Puritanism which Defoe shared with his heroine' (Rise, p.129).

The Defoe presented by Watt is an author caught in the power of forces greater than himself. These forces were not the forces of insight or expressive talent, but the unconscious forces of economics and history, shaping Defoe as they shaped the society around him. Only the sophistication of modern readers can detect the hypocrisy of an economically-based society which still claims the values of the family. The interest of Defoe, then, is the interest of a muddle, and the satisfaction of the book lies in discerning the double standards which shaped it. Defoe was an artistic failure, in that his vision was confused and even incoherent, but it is this very failure which makes him interesting to modern readers.

The most concise statement of the contrary view to Watt's can be found in the chapter on Defoe which opens A.D. McKillop's The Early Masters of English Fiction (1956). McKillop's main contribution is his analysis of Defoe's religious sensibility, which he, unlike Watt, takes to be genuine. By accepting the religious pretensions of Defoe's characters as sincere, McKillop can say that Defoe was aware of the conflict in his novels, and that such conflict was used to develop and explore central themes. McKillop says:

---

57. George Saintsbury, The English Novel (London and New York, 1913), p.69.

Defoe accepts to a certain extent the Mandevillian opposition between self-interest and virtue, but in some of his more important works of fiction, he softens the 'paradox of trade and morality' by substituting for it a 'paradox of adventure and morality', and this is one of the keys, though not the only key to the careers of some of his fictional characters, Crusoe, Moll Flanders, Singleton, and Colonel Jacque. 58

According to McKillop, then, the fictions were shaped by conscious decisions on Defoe's part, not by the unconscious forces of historical location. That is, not only did Defoe have formulated plans, but also the interest of the texts is the discovery of these plans. As McKillop sees it, Defoe consciously selected the most suitable literary device for the promotion of his designs. 'The essential step is the assumption of a role that fits Defoe's utilitarian and objective approach' (Masters, p. 19). Notice how this small difference in estimating Defoe's self-consciousness affects everything said about Defoe - what to Watt is 'moral imperceptiveness...so laughably clear' (Rise, p. 129) becomes to McKillop a carefully-chosen 'paradox of adventure and morality' (Masters, p. 5). For Watt, Defoe's only aim was that of the market-researcher, finding a lucrative asset and unhesitatingly peddling it. For McKillop, Defoe was not simply pandering unconsciously to an audience, rather he was assessing what this audience <sup>(not)</sup> needed / wanted and supplying it. The question becomes one of estimating what Defoe thought of fiction as being. Was it simply a commodity to be dispensed? Or was it a powerful force which could improve its purchasers?

Unfortunately, there is no way of resolving this conflict of opinion by referring it to the arbitration of Defoe's own comments on the status of fiction. He rarely made any, and those he did make were often contradictory. Defoe certainly recognised the power of fiction, its moral status, in those passages in The Family Instructor where he approved of the mother who would burn her daughter's frivolous reading - novels, romances and such frippery. Elsewhere, he revealed an awareness of the problems of didactic fiction, of lying in order to reach the truth. Under the guise of 'the Age's Humble Servant', he said this:

---

58. A.D. McKillop, The Early Masters of English Fiction (Lawrence, 1956), p. 5. Later references will be to this edition, hereinafter cited as Masters, and will be incorporated in the text.

21

I cannot be so ignorant of my own intentions, as not to know, that in many cases I shall act the Divine, and draw necessary practical inferences from the extraordinary Remarkables of this Book, and some Digressions which I hope may not be altogether useless in this case.

And while I pretend to a thing so solemn, I cannot but premise I should stand convicted of a double Imposture, to forge a Story, and then preach Repentance to the Reader from a crime greater than that I would have him repent of: endeavouring by a Lie to correct the Reader's Vices, and Sin against Truth to bring the Reader off from sinning against Sense. 59

Defoe here seems to have been aware that his books were more than just commodities, to be unloaded and forgotten. He shows an awareness, or at least, a partial awareness of the problematic moral state of the author, and it may have been for this reason, rather than for economic ones, that he posed as only the editor of his fictions, assuring us of their truth. However, this stern pose is self-defeating, since the attempt to persuade that fiction is true only leads to yet greater dissembling. As an illustration, look at this passage where Defoe offered a new work to the reader:

It is not a romantic Tale that the Reader is here presented with, but a real History; not the adventures of a Robinson Crusoe, a Colonel Jack, or a Moll Flanders, but the actions of the Highland Rogue, a Man that has been too notorious to pass for a mere imaginary Person.. 60

Why did Defoe disparage his own earlier works? Certainly it does not seem to make marketing sense to abuse other productions of your own pen. I think Defoe here betrays a concern for truth and authenticity, which to some extent corroborates McKillop's claim that Defoe was a moralist of sorts. However, we must remember that this possible moralist did go out of his way to deceive his public in the various

---

59. Daniel Defoe, The Storm: or, A Collection of the Most Remarkable Casualties and Disasters, etc. (London, 1704), sig.A3r.

60. Daniel Defoe, The Highland Rogue (London, 1723), A2v.

prefaces to the novels, by claiming the fictions to be genuine factual accounts - 'The Editor believes the thing to be a just History of Fact; neither is there any appearance of Fiction in it' (Crusoe, p.1). Does this justify Watt's view of Defoe as opportunist? From what we can see, Defoe does not seem to have had one consistent view on, or attitude towards, the problems of fiction, and it is this lack of consistency which raises grave problems.

Elsewhere, Defoe was equally inconsistent. Often, a careful reading of The Review shows completely contradictory ideas being expressed within weeks of each other. As an instructive instance of this, let us look at Defoe's views on the regulation of the press. We saw earlier how Defoe's more popular works were pirated, and how his name was put to texts of which he was completely ignorant. As we would expect, Defoe the projector had plans to rectify this abuse. First of all, it is interesting to see the terms in which Defoe discussed piracy:

The Practice is the Shame and Scandal of the present Time - and gives a Liberty to daily Invasions of Property equal in Villainy to robbing a House, or plundering an Hospital. Nor is this all; it is a Discouragement to Industry, a Dishonour to Learning, and a Cheat upon the Whole Nation. By this Practice, a Man, who has study'd several Years to perform the most elaborate Work; and perhaps been at 500*l*. Charge to print it, besides all other Pains, and to whom such a Work might otherwise be an Inheritance, and to his Family, has his Labour destroy'd, his Expenses lost, and his Copy re-printed by pyratrical Booksellers and Printers, who eat the Gain of the poor Man's Labour, destroy and spoil the Work itself, cheat the Buyer by performing it imperfect, and ruin the laborious Author. 61

Defoe's view in this passage is a very commercial one. He seems to be talking of property, not of creative endeavour. Defoe looked upon literature as a commercial enterprise and hoped to see it organised more efficiently along these lines. His first stipulation was that there should be no return to the old system of

---

61. The Review, VI, 363b. Further references to The Review will be incorporated into the text.



25

pre-publication censorship - 'NO LICENSER, whatever you do - Partiality, Bribery, Siding with Parties, permitting Error, and crushing valuable Learning, were always the Consequences of a Licenser of the Press' (Review, VI, 416a). However, despite this vehemence, he still saw restraint as essential - 'on these Accounts, I cannot but agree that a Regulation, or due Restraint of the Press is a good Work'.<sup>62</sup>

What form was this restraint to take? His first stipulation was that it should be a punishable offence for any printer or publisher to issue a book without the consent of its author. In jocular mood, Defoe offered as punishment the enforced reading of Elegy on the Author of the True Born Englishman, at least once a week (Review, 25.7.1704). However, he did also offer a more severe punishment - '51. per Sheet for the said Copy, to be paid Half to the Queen, Half to the Person injur'd' (Review, VI, 419b). Such a sum would have served to compensate authors whose livelihood had dropped through piracy, though of course it would only be practicable if the responsible publisher could be located. A major drawback, as far as Defoe was concerned, was that such a measure did nothing about the seditious pamphlet, published with the consent of the author - what he called the 'swarm' of 'Socinian, Heretical, Deistic and Erroneous Books' (Review, VI, 403b). To combat this, Defoe proposed another innovation; he demanded that 'every Author, who causes any Thing he writes to be printed or publish'd shall be oblig'd to cause his Name to be printed in the Frontispiece of the Book' (Review, VI, 420a). Formulated like this, the responsibility lay with the author. Elsewhere, Defoe changed his proposal slightly, and recommended a law which would 'oblige the Printer or Bookseller to place the Author's Name in the Title, or himself' (Regulation, p.24).<sup>63</sup>

No penalties were specified for those failing to comply, but the main point is that the Author was being granted further security, at the expense of greater responsibility, and the general significance of the proposals is that they show Defoe's plea for commercial honesty.<sup>64</sup>

---

62. An Essay on the Regulation of the Press, Luttrell Reprints No. 7, ed. John Robert Moore (Oxford, 1948), p.4. Further references will be to this edition, hereinafter cited as Regulation, and will be incorporated in the text.

63. This proposal was amended further in The Review, where Defoe was explicitly against 'the Tyranny of a Licenser, or an absolute prohibition, by obliging the Author of every book to set his Name to the Book' (II, 427a).

64. Defoe's proposals are part of a contemporary debate about how to replace the lapsed Licensing Act. The ideas he presented are not radically different from those contained in Government proposals of

So much for Defoe's proposals. How did they affect his practice? On a number of occasions, Defoe set the book-buyer's mind at rest by identifying his own work. In The Review, he claimed that, 'he wrot [sic] nothing but what has fairly been Publisht as his own, and as he hopes he shall write anything that he shall either be afraid or ashamed to own; so whatever he writes for the future shall have his Hand fairly set to it, that every body may know it, and wishes all Authors were oblig'd to do the like' (Review, I, 179a-b).

This must have been very reassuring for the buying public, but unfortunately Defoe's high words did not accord with his practice. Of the five hundred and forty-seven works listed by Moore, only nineteen displayed the name or initials of their author.<sup>65</sup>

Certainly, Defoe did occasionally show his face in more devious ways. The True Born Englishman, though published anonymously, was soon identifiable as one of Defoe's.<sup>65</sup>

Consequently, later works attributed to 'the Author of the True Born Englishman' would be assumed (rightly or wrongly) to be by Defoe.<sup>66</sup>

There were a further twenty-eight items signed authentically as such, along with many more spurious attributions, between 1701 and 1707.

Another sixteen were collected under that name in the True Collection (1703), and a further ten in the Second Collection (1705). Other apparently anonymous titles were obviously attributable to Defoe, such as the Hymn to the Pillory (1703), which, though unsigned, was sold under the pillory in which Defoe was displayed. Similarly, Defoe's early arrest

the time, though Defoe never went so far as to suggest that all printing presses be registered - he may have seen any such move as an unwarranted intrusion into trade. At least six bills were presented in Parliament, concerning the restraint of the press, between 1695 and 1702, but none reached the statute. The only law to limit the publishing of books was an Act of 1707, which made it a treasonable offence to publish the Pretender's right to the throne. There was no general law governing the conduct of authors until the passing of Fox's Libel Act in 1792. See Laurence Hanson, Government and the Press 1625-1753 (1936, reprinted, Oxford, 1967), pp. 7-10.

65. John Robert Moore, A Checklist of the Writings of Daniel Defoe (2nd ed., Hamden, Connecticut, 1971). For the relevant titles see numbers, 16, 31, 38, 41, 63, 85, 106, 117, 119, 143, 153, 161, 162, 167, 171, 173, 177, 307 and 430.
66. The title was revealed as Defoe's in A True Collection of the Writings of the Author of the True Born Englishman, where there is an engraving of Defoe, with his name appended, as a frontispiece.

23

after the appearance of The Shortest Way shows that his identity was not the best-kept secret. Also, he occasionally used the pages of the Review to admit authorship of originally unsigned works. Examples of this are Giving Alms no Charity (IV, 27b), The Consolidator (V, 71a), and the History of the Union (III, 658a).

However, the striking thing about the canon is its reliance on anonymity. Even the Essay on the Regulation of the Press, which contained the proposals about compulsory signature, was issued anonymously. More importantly, none of the works of fiction was signed by Defoe as author. He may have been recognised as the author - note how quickly after Crusoe Gildon attacked its genuine author in The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Mr. D... De F..... of London, Hosier (1719). However this recognition was not as widespread as has sometimes been thought. 'Philobiblios', writing in the Gentleman's Magazine in 1785 was far from confident about ascribing authorship - 'I Think Robinson Crusoe is allowed to have been the work of Defoe, but I know of no particulars of Defoe's life, nor of what other books he wrote'.<sup>67</sup>

There are two points to be drawn from this reliance on anonymity. Firstly, the obvious discrepancy between Defoe's professed views on publishing and his practice shows us how difficult it is to rely on any external corroboration when discussing his work. It becomes very difficult indeed to explore Defoe's genuine views on anything, if there is this amount of downright contradiction implicit in their expression. Once again, we are thrown back on to the texts themselves. I opened this discussion by quoting a recent editor of Crusoe and his views on the lack of an answer to 'the central questions of Defoe's basic sincerity, exact intentions, and achievement' (Crusoe, p.viii). In the light of what we have seen in this issue of publishing practice, it becomes, perhaps, impossible to answer the questions of this kind. All we can hope for is that close examination of the fiction itself will reveal Defoe's sincerity, intentions and achievement, irrespective of his other pronouncements.

Secondly, we can to some extent resolve the implicit contradiction here by suggesting that both proposals and practice arose from the same basic attitude. Defoe was concerned with letters as primarily a branch of trade. Thus, his proposals were designed to protect the traders (authors) from their exploiters (publishers and booksellers).

---

67. GM, lv (November 1785), 882. Quoted in Rogers, op.cit., p.55.

Similarly, he tried to protect the customer from unscrupulous trading. However, since he had to protect his own livelihood, he was prepared to do anything he could, within the then-current laws, to increase his sales. An example of this would be his unashamed, anonymous comparison of the author of The True Born Englishman and Shakespeare. Such self-advertisement was common in The Review. In October 1719, Defoe discussed a recent pamphlet called A Letter from a Gentleman at the Court of St. Germain's. Though he found himself unable to recommend the gentleman's opinions, he still recommended the pamphlet - 'Whether that Letter be a Genuine Produce of a Popish Author, or no, I do not determine...The book is worthy any Man's perusal, and I refer to it' (VII, 371a-b). Defoe was being rather disingenuous here, for he knew well enough who the author of this pamphlet was. He wrote it himself.<sup>68</sup> Another example can be found in 1711, when one entire issue of The Review was given over to a discussion of the remarkable prophecies contained in a volume called The British Visions. Defoe talked of it as 'a little Book which I found at Newcastle, as I last came up from Scotland, and is Sold but for two-pence' (VIII, 45a). The discussion looked on the book very favourably, and may have induced many readers to lay out 'but....two-pence' upon it. Despite all the apparent innocence and impartiality, Defoe was once again surreptitiously recommending his own work.

In all such instances of contradiction and self-advertisement, Defoe seemed more concerned with literature as something to be sold rather than as something to be read. This concern relates very closely to the controversy surrounding Defoe's learning. His attitude towards his craft (a more appropriate word, I feel, than 'art') could be determined by his views on other authors. However, the only indication we have of his reading, apart from scattered references to Cervantes and Samuel Butler, is a sales catalogue from Defoe's library. Unfortunately, this is of little assistance, for it includes, without discrimination, the books of a Dr. Phillips Farewell. Since the catalogue also fails to include Defoe's acknowledged favourites - like Don Quixote or Hudibras - it looks as though the presence of a book on the list cannot guarantee that Defoe had read it, and the absence of a book cannot guarantee that he had not read it.<sup>69</sup> We can, of course, provide a list of books used as sources for the novels - as Second

---

68. Not only is this pamphlet written by Defoe, according to Moore it is 'one of Defoe's best and most characteristic writings' (Checklist, p.77).

69. See H. Heindereich's The Libraries of Daniel Defoe and Phillips Farewell (Berlin, 1970). For a necessarily tentative indication of the Defoe volumes, see C.R. Kropf, 'The Sale of Defoe's Library', PBSA, 65 (1971), 123-133. The speculations of G.A. Aitken, who found the catalogue, in The Athenaeum (1895), pp. 706-7, are largely unfounded and frequently unconvincing.



does in his Studies in the Narrative Method of Defoe (1924). However, even this is of limited use, for though it tells us those books Defoe definitely had read, it gives no indication of how selective he was in his compilation of details. That is, such a list can give us no indication of what Defoe did not adapt, and so we cannot form an impression of his aesthetic decision-making.

One reference to his obviously wide reading was given in the 1718 pamphlet, The Vindication of the Press. In the course of this, he asserted a knowledge of Cicero, Horace, Chaucer, Spencer (sic), Shakespear, Milton, Cowley, Otway, Jonson, Dryden, Pope, Rowe, Prior, Congreve, Phillips, Farquhar, Addison, Steele, Oldsworth, Rochester and Butler. Others referred to in the course of The Review were Aesop, Homer, Ovid, Tacitus, Virgil, Plutarch, Lucretius, Juvenal, Demosthenes, Erasmus, Marvell, Suckling, Bunyan, Locke and Boileau. Though we may be surprised at the apparent number of classical authors in this list, it still seems obvious that Defoe's knowledge of the ancients may have been rather patchy. In one pamphlet, he discussed the value of translations,

...the King of France outdoes all the Princes of Europe, where such Encouragement is given to Learning, that all useful Books in the World now speak French, and a Man may be an Universall Schollar, read Virgil, Horace, Ovid, and all the Antient Poets; Cicero, Plato, Epictetus, Aristotle, and all the Antient Philosophers; St. Athanasius, St. Augustine, and all the Primitive Fathers; Plutarch, Livy, and all the Antient Historians; and yet neither understand a word of Greek or Latin.

(Regulation, pp. 12-13)

The inference to be drawn from this passage is that Defoe valued the reading of classical literature, not out of simple reverence for learning, but out of a desire to understand and to propagate the knowledge held therein. Also, though I find it very hard to believe that Defoe himself had read all these authors, he certainly wanted us to accept that he had and he dropped an impressive list of names,

I have rather laboured this notion of Defoe's reading, because it reveals the central dilemma with which we are faced. If Defoe's works are the result of such an apparently shifty and confused mind, if they reveal such diverse muddled concerns, why have they been so consistently popular? I have illustrated the various deceptions and skullduggeries practiced by Defoe in the presentation of his fiction, and I have illustrated also the

parallel confusion in critical estimates of Defoe's work. From the evidence of the previous couple of pages, it seems as though we cannot resolve the critical problem by referring to Defoe's other works. Yet we must face the fact that Crusoe, at least, remains one of the most popular works ever published. After its first publication in 1719, and its subsequent popular triumph, Crusoe was treated to the sincerest form of flattery. As well as Defoe's own two sequels, there were vast numbers of less significant imitations. Ullrich, in his Robinson und Robinsonaden (Weimar, 1898), listed these imitations, and managed to find as many as ninety-eight before 1800. This is certainly a significant figure, but even more interesting is the evidence of Crusoe's continued popularity throughout the nineteenth century. Ullrich listed one hundred and thirty-five separate imitations between 1800 and 1898. The original island was offered an intriguing variety of new inhabitants - there was a Catholic Crusoe in 1862, and a black one in 1877. Also, our original hero was cast ashore on a surprising variety of new shores - he hazarded the Arctic in 1854, and, intriguingly, the Bois de Boulogne in 1858. This type of experimentation is by no means dead, and almost inevitably has produced a film version of Robinson Crusoe on Mars (1964).

The most famous of these adaptations is probably the Swiss Family Robinson or perhaps the Ben Gunn plot in Treasure Island. But things had become so congested by 1877 that we hear of The Six Hundred Crusoes, and the attribution of progeny was so varied that in 1860 we are told of The Dog Crusoe (did he teach his parrot to bark, I wonder?). The lasting popularity of such works was so great that even a description of a bookshop window in 1843 seemed inevitably to refer to the imitators,.

...a trying shop; where children's books  
were sold, and where poor Robinson Crusoe  
stood alone in his might, with dog and  
hatchet, goat-skin cap and fowling-pieces;  
calmly surveying Philip Quarll and the  
host of imitators round him...70

As I have said, these imitations retained something of the original, but altered some of the circumstances. Other types of imitation simply retained the name (which must still have been marketable) while wandering very far from Defoe. Such works were the numerous pantomimes, starting with Sheridan's Robinson Crusoe, or Harlequin Friday (1781)

---

70. Charles Dickens, Martin Chuzzlewit (1843-4), ch.5. Quarll is the hero of The Hermit (1727), which actually managed a reprint as late as 1869.

and continuing through the centuries. Also, there are more recent significant works which owe something to Defoe - like Muriel Spark's Robinson (1958), Michel Tournier's Friday, or The Other Island (1967), William Golding's Pincher Martin (1956)<sup>71</sup> or Iain Crichton Smith's The Notebooks of Robinson Crusoe (1974). Perhaps we could also include the allusions to Crusoe in Ulysses as a less strict example of this.<sup>72</sup>

However, only with Crusoe did Defoe achieve such popularity<sup>73</sup>. His other attempts at fiction have never been as popular, and they seriously limit the possibilities of an overall estimate of Defoe based solely on the universality of Crusoe. His offered sequel, The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, was a less striking success, reaching a fourth edition by 1722. There was also a third part, The Serious Reflections of Robinson Crusoe, published in 1720, but this has rarely been read since - indeed, almost the only modern reference to it is a misquotation used at the opening of Albert Camus' La Peste (1947). Defoe's only other novel to achieve any lasting popularity is Moll Flanders, which went through three editions during its year of publication, 1722. This work retained the interest of readers and critics throughout the nineteenth century, though it has not always been praised (as in the quotations from Hazlitt and Scott, supra). More recently it has attracted the praise of E.M. Forster and Dorothy Van Ghent, and, apart from Crusoe, it is the only work to be treated thoroughly in The Rise of the Novel.

Some of the other novels seem to have achieved little popularity in their own time, and they have only rarely been unearthed since. The Memoirs of a Cavalier (1720) did not appear in a subsequent edition until a rather dubious printing at 'Leedes' some thirty years later. Defoe's last novel, Roxana, seems to have languished, not appearing between its initial publication in 1724 and its second printing in 1745. Moreover, this second printing was not only substantially mutilated, it also contained a conclusion which was certainly not the work of Defoe. This corruption passed unnoticed throughout the nineteenth century, and the evasive moralising it contained may explain Saintsbury's remark that 'there are few more repulsive heroines in fiction'.<sup>74</sup> Of the others, Captain Singleton (1720) did not reach a second edition until 1737, and A Journal of the Plague Year, which is now one of the most popular of Defoe's works,

---

71. This particular parallel has been analysed by J.I. Biles and C.R. Kropf, 'The Cleft Rock of Conversion', Studies in the Literary Imagination, II (1969) 17-4.

72. Rather surprisingly, Joyce seems to have been an admirer of Defoe. See his Daniel Defoe, ed. & trans. Prescott (Buffalo, 1964).

73. Though Crusoe sold well, it would be misguided to think of it as a best-seller. Many editions were published rapidly, but the number of books in each was rather small. See Pat Rogers, Robinson Crusoe (London, 1979), pp. 4-10.

74. The English Novel. (London & New York, 1913), p. 71.

was not in circulation from its initial publication in 1722 until a second edition of 1754. Colonel Jack fared slightly better, with a fourth edition being published in 1738, sixteen years after the first. The Memoirs of Captain Carleton (1728) proved less popular, and in Professor Moore's words 'the reappearance of the unsold sheets with frequent changes of the title page or of some details of the dedication or the preface is one of the minor perplexities of the Defoe bibliography'.<sup>75</sup> The particular appearances may be perplexing, but the reason for this minor deception must surely be the failure of the first issue to sell adequately.

It seems then that if we are to seek consistency within Defoe's work, we must explain the curious lack of appreciation accorded to these secondary works. Some critics are apparently happy to discard them, as of little value. One such is Defoe's early biographer, George Chalmers,

Yet I am not convinced, that the world has been made much wiser, or better, by the perusal of these lives: they may have diverted the lower orders, but I doubt if they have much improved them; if however they have not made them better, they have not left them worse. But they do not exhibit many scenes which are welcome to cultivated minds. 76

What Chalmers says here is similar to the words of Hazlitt and Scott referred to earlier. Again, there is an attempt to place Defoe clearly as a writer best suited to the 'lower orders', and to base the interpretation of his works on this audience's expectations. By doing so, we can tolerate his rather feeble secondary works, but only just. However, other critics see in these secondary works evidence of a different kind of greatness. For instance, here is Charles Lamb,

It happened not seldom that one work of some author has so transcendently surpassed in execution the rest of his compositions, that the world has agreed to pass a sentence of dismissal upon the latter, and to consign them to total neglect and oblivion...Again, it has happened, that from no inferior merit of execution in the rest, but from superior good fortune in the choice of its subject some single work shall have been suffered to eclipse, and cast into the shades the deserts

---

75. Daniel Defoe: Citizen of the Modern World (University of Chicago, 1958), p. 261. I am treating the Memoirs of Captain Carleton as though it was by Defoe. However, both Dr. Johnson and Sir Walter Scott were convinced it was a genuine memoir, and recent scholarship seems to raise grave doubts about Defoe's contribution. See Stieg Hargevick, The Disputed Assignment of Memoirs of an English Officer to Daniel Defoe (Stockholm, 1974).

76. Chalmers, Life (1785), in Rogers, op.cit., p.62.



of its less fortunate brethren....But in no case has this excluding partiality been exerted with more unfairness than against what may be termed the secondary novels of De Foe. 77.

Lamb's defence is, of course, suspect, since it begs the question of 'merit of execution', but it is interesting to see his attempts at rehabilitation. And it is even more interesting to see the rather misguided attempt to prove consistency of either intent (Chalmers) or achievement (Lamb) leading to misreadings of the novels.

Put simply, it appears that Defoe's work is inconsistent, both in intent and achievement, and that the critical confusion I have been outlining in this chapter arises from attempts to solve this inconsistency. In the ensuing pages, there will be no such attempt. Rather, the obvious inconsistencies will be presented in as clear a way as possible, to reveal contradiction, not to explain it away. We have seen a great deal of the critical confusion surrounding Defoe, and we have also seen that his own practice in the case of, say, anonymous publication, has not invited any comprehensive solution. However, it is noticeable that Defoe's fiction has been treated as though it were uniform and consistent. Of all the critics cited, none seems to be willing to see Defoe's fiction as inconsistent, variable in quality and haphazard in invention. Most commonly, Defoe's fiction is blithely labelled as realistic and picaresque. These two terms are symptomatic of clumsiness in discussion of Defoe, and bear examination in their own right.

In the next two chapters, each of these terms will be discussed in turn, and then Defoe's fiction will be examined to see if these terms can be adequately used as a description of it. I do not intend to solve the problems of reading and evaluating Defoe, but rather to show how these problems have been either misunderstood or ignored. As well as examining the meaning and status of 'realism' and 'picaresque' as critical terms, it is hoped that the investigation will be useful in the fuller understanding of Defoe's fiction. Finally, it is worth reminding ourselves of Defoe's own advice to readers before continuing.

I see nothing remains to say of me,  
or of my Book; they that search for  
Faults may find them plenty, and they  
that will mend them for me, shall always  
have Acknowledgment for the Kindness:  
But he that wou'd make Faults where  
there is none, has little Charity, and  
less Honesty. 78.

---

77. Lamb, 'On the Secondary Novels of De Foe,' in Rogers, op.cit., p.87.

78. True Collection (1703), Preface, sig. A6r.

## CHAPTER TWO : REALISM

There are a number of terms which may be used in both literary criticism and ordinary discourse, though not always with the same meaning or significance in each. Events in life can be described as tragic, pathetic, comic, ironic, absurd, romantic or dramatic. People may display wit, irony, fancy, or imagination. And attitudes, approaches, demands, assessments or inquiries can all be termed realistic. This is one sense of the word 'realism' which avoids much ambiguity. As one critic says:

Realism 'in life' connotes a way of estimating, or assessing a situation; having 'an eye for the main chance', making a fair or comprehensive and adequate judgment; but 'realistic' is also synonymous with clever, sharp, expedient, all the way to cynical and unscrupulous.

The realist, in this sense, is someone aware of the most expedient course of action, or the least impractical assessment of a situation. Note, too, the way the writer quoted properly shows how 'realistic' moves from approval to suspicion - how it becomes associated with a lack of ideals and so with shady behaviour. It is this disapproving undertone which has been apparent when critics have called Defoe realistic. Both William Minto and Leslie Stephen seem to have taken offence at Defoe's reluctance to settle down to an honourable trade, and consequently saw his novels as exemplifying his realistic desire for comfort and money. Some modern critics, as we shall see, claim that Defoe's fiction is thematically organised by the narrator's search for stability, expressed largely in financial and domestic terms. This description becomes an implicit assertion of Defoe's moral imperceptiveness. Representative of such views is C.J. Scrimgeour, who tells us that 'it is doubtful that Defoe thought greatly about himself as an artist at all, and the real Defoe trademark appears not in the necessary though meretricious authenticity of his narrative, but in the way in which he uses it, the way in which both aesthetics and reality bow their heads before commerce'.<sup>2</sup>

- 
1. J.P. Stern, On Realism (London and Boston, 1973), p.40.
  2. G.J. Scrimgeour, 'The Problem of Realism in Defoe's Captain Singleton', H.L.Q., XXVII, 1963-64, 37.

Scrimgeour moves very easily from a reference to the technique of Defoe's fiction - in this case, verisimilitude - to the dominance of commerce as a theme. This sense of the commercial or mercantile basis of Defoe's writing is a subdued use of 'realism' in the sense of 'an eye for the main chance'. Scrimgeour then moves from an analysis of literary technique to a rather slighting moral assessment of Defoe and his narrators. J.B.Priestley puts forward a similar view of Defoe's realism, when he says that 'His very limitations as a man and a writer - his narrow outlook, lack of poetry and humour, prosy moralizing - help to create this genius.'<sup>3</sup> Such a sudden conflation of meanings needs examination. The aim here will be to see if there is a sense of 'realism' which describes an aesthetic or literary quality or property, and which avoids the undertones of unscrupulousness, since these may be critically unhelpful. In other words, it seems worth trying to see if the application of 'realism' and 'realistic' to Defoe's fiction can clear up critical confusion, or whether such application is an example of critical confusion.

In the last few years, Raymond Williams has attempted to clear up just this kind of confusion. In his discussion of the word 'realism', he distinguishes four different usages. The first two cover the Realist/Nominalist distinction in medieval philosophy and the use of 'realism' as a synonym for 'materialism'. These two senses are, he says, largely defunct. However, the other two senses are still current, and still open to debate. The first is the use of the word 'as a description of facing up to things as they really are, and not as we imagine or would like them to be'.<sup>4</sup> In this sense we are talking about realism as Stern defined it, and as Minto, Stephen and latterly Scrimgeour applied to Defoe. As a different usage, Williams distinguishes the use of the word 'as a term to describe a method or an attitude in art and literature - at first an exceptional accuracy of representation, later a commitment to describing events and showing things as they actually exist' (p.217). This is the sense to be discussed in the following pages.

---

3. J.B.Priestley, Literature and Western Man (1960, Penguin ed., Harmondsworth, 1969), p.95.

4. Raymond Williams, Keywords, A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (Glasgow, 1976) p.217. Further references will be incorporated into the text.

Williams may skip rather blithely over the historical process involved in the transition from 'realism' as verisimilitude, to 'realism', as the description of the real. However, his sense of the encroaching moral element is accurate, and this process can be more clearly traced. The best way of seeing the connection between the descriptive and evaluative senses of 'realism' is to look at the notion that realistic art is that which, by whatever means, penetrates to the truth about life. One critic puts his views as follows:

My view is that art is realistic when it deals, to take some words of The Prelude out of their context, with,

'The very world, which is the world  
Of all of us, - The place where, in the end,  
We found our happiness, or not at all',  
and deals with this world which is personal,  
yet universal (all of us) in such a way as to  
'tell the truth' about it, a truth which  
far from degrading art to 'reportage' requires  
the most complete mastery of artistic devices  
for its expression.<sup>5</sup>

The word 'expression' is vital here. It implies that realism is the theme or import of any such successful work, not the means by which some other theme is developed or revealed. 'Realism' in this sense demands genuine insight into life; it is not a describable aesthetic property. In terms of the novel, the most obvious manifestation of such 'realism' would be found in the Bildungsroman, or the novel of dawning disillusion. In, for example, Jude the Obscure or Sons and Lovers or A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, the central character eventually comes to realise the falsity of values he has previously held and comes to accept different values, which he takes to be true. However, before we call these novels realistic, in this sense, are we not obliged to accept those values ourselves?

- 
5. E.B.Greenwood, 'Reflections on Professor Wellek's Concept of Realism', Neophilologus, xlv (1962), p.95. The article Greenwood is considering is René Wellek, 'The Concept of Realism in Literary Scholarship; Neophilologus, xlv (1960), 1-20 reprinted in his Concepts of Criticism, ed. Stephen G.Nichols, Jr. (New Haven and London, 1963), pp.222-256. I shall have occasion to refer to Wellek's article later, when all page references will be to the reprinted edition. Cf. 'Art always aims at the representation of Reality, i.e. of Truth... Realism is thus the basis of all Art, and its antithesis is not Idealism, but Falsism'. C.H.Lewes, 'Realism in Art : Recent German Fiction,' Westminster Review, 70, October 1858, pp.271-287.

35

If it is the task of the realistic novel to 'tell the truth', as Greenwood maintains, then the values taken as real at the end of any successful work must be themselves seen as true. Consequently, we can only recognise as genuine or successful works, those which convince us of their truth. Greenwood certainly concedes the logical connection between a work's realism and its aesthetic value. "Don't we say that if (the work of literature) is 'convincing' or 'unconvincing', the 'real thing' or 'faked', and in saying this aren't we implying that good art is true and real and that bad art is false and unreal?" (Greenwood, 'Reflections...', p.97). Greenwood does not elaborate on the relationship between a convincing work and a true work, nor does he say whether he takes the 'real thing' to refer to real (i.e. genuine) art or to realistic art. There are many difficulties involved in his position, related to the major problem of art and belief, but we can see his argument as an illustration of the essentially moralistic use of 'realism'.

By combining the values of aesthetics and authenticity, Greenwood does provide grounds for assessing the importance of any piece of literature.<sup>6</sup> In this case, Defoe would be a realistic writer only if he presented his values clearly, and if they were values we could accept. He would then be a major important writer. The Bildungsroman becomes a valued convention because it allows the critical examination of values, and displays the triumph of truth over falsehood. Such an idea also appears in critics who do not commit themselves to such a close combination of art and truth. When Harry Levin says, 'in sounding the hollowness of sentimentality, Flaubert was performing the habitual task of the realist',<sup>7</sup> he combines realism and truth in a less obvious, but still very close way. However, Levin defines realism differently, and so avoids the more damaging conclusions embraced by Greenwood. The main failing in Greenwood's position is that it reduces realism to truth (or perhaps elevates it to truth). Thus, by making truth an aesthetic property, he loses the descriptive force of 'realism' as a discriminative concept. It is a function of this position that all good art is real (or, remembering the ambivalence of 'convincing', all good art seems real). Consequently, naming any work as realistic provides no description of it, only an evaluation. A realistic work

---

6. Greenwood's argument, of course, only holds for the representational arts. Unless he would want to claim that music was representational, he must limit his argument more than he does.

7. Harry Levin, The Gates of Horn: A Study of Five French Realists, (New York, 1963), p.225.



in Greenwood's sense, can take any form, adopt any convention which will assist in the pursuit of truth. The only distinction between a writer who is realistic and one who is not, as far as the term reveals, is that the realistic writer more successfully achieves the aims of a work of literature than the unrealistic.

The use of 'unrealistic' here is striking. It reveals the notion that a work which is not realistic is somehow improper - whimsical perhaps, or insufficiently serious. No such suggestions are conveyed by the use of the other possible antonym of 'realistic' - 'non-realistic'. The aim of this chapter is to find a possible description of the characteristics of a work which would falsify the assertion that it was non-realistic. If this can be done, it will generate a cognitive concept of realism, avoiding the moral overtones we have detected in many critics so far. Realism will be an observable feature of the work (normally, in this case, a novel), not a criterion for its success. By developing such a cognitive concept, we may detect certain features of Defoe's fiction as a possible preliminary to evaluation, not as an evaluation in itself.

The best known critical book on realism is, without doubt, Erich Auerbach's Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature (Berne, 1946).<sup>8</sup> However, despite the promise in the subtitle, the book attempts no comprehensive survey of mimetic techniques, or any history of their usage, and, sadly, Defoe is never mentioned. Auerbach deals with a highly selective number of extracts from European literature, ranging from Homer to Virginia Woolf, and he analyses the significance of each passage in terms of its attempt to convey or reveal the known world. He is, generally, most reticent about the principles underlying his endeavour, and it is not until the second half of the book that the purpose behind his selection is stated:

In our study we are looking for representations of everyday life in which that life is treated seriously, in terms of its human and social problems or even of its tragic complications. (p.342)

---

8. All page references will be to the translation by Willard R. Trask (Princeton, 1953), and they will be incorporated in the text. My treatment of Auerbach is indebted to a review of this translation by René Wellek, 'Auerbach's Special Realism', Kenyon Review, 16 (1954), 299-307.

He feels free to range over many works, which would not normally be thought to be realistic in technique (e.g. Chanson de Roland is discussed, pp. 96-122), and the explanation for this eclecticism is found in the Epilogue, where he says:

I was no longer concerned with realism in general, the question was to what degree and in what manner realistic subjects were treated seriously. problematically or tragically. (p.556)

Of the two formulations of his intentions, it is noticeable that Auerbach barely once mentions the social side of life, and then only fleetingly. As we shall see, the French Realists and Naturalists placed the highest emphasis on the treatment of society in fiction, and Defoe clearly placed his protagonists in a social environment. Why does Auerbach dismiss or at least diminish the importance of the portrayal of society?

The reason seems to be that his concept of realism, like Greenwood's, is evaluative rather than descriptive - that is, he talks of the realistic writer as one who portrays life in its tragic complexity, a complexity that Auerbach himself is committed to. Look at what he says of Montaigne:

...among all his contemporaries he had the closest conception of the problem of man's self-orientation; that is, the task of making oneself at home in existence without the fixed points of support. In him for the first time, man's life - the random personal life as a whole - becomes problematic in the modern sense. (p.311)

We see here Montaigne being applauded for being correct. That is, Montaigne, alone amongst his contemporaries, saw the randomness of life in the way that Auerbach sees it. Auerbach, then, is not concerned with realism on its own, but with the adaptation of the tragic or problematic conception of the world in an accurate form. He never defines what precisely he means by realism as a technique, or if he even recognises such a thing. We come to see his conception of mankind, of tragic dilemma and of the role of literature, but we are never sure of his views on the use of different literary techniques to present accurate portrayals of each of these.

René Wellek seems nearest the mark when he distinguishes two different kinds of realism in Mimesis. Firstly, as displayed in the extracts from the Bible, from Antoine de Sale, and from Saint-Simon, there is the existential concept of realism. In these cases, the

28

authors penetrate to the heart of the problematic nature of existence. Decisions have to be made, and the texts show the agonies of choice. This may be what Auerbach means when he talks about Montaigne's 'conception of the problem of man's self-orientation', which seems to be the substance of Montaigne's realism. Secondly, there is historical realism, which is revealed in the extracts from Balzac and Stendhal. In his extracts from the French Realists, Auerbach comes nearest to a treatment of the social aspects of realism - the presentation of man in contractual and emotional links with his fellows. It is in the context of accurate social portrayal that we see the individual in thrall of the forces of history, which may be analogous to the antique view of change as 'fortune breaking in from without' (p.318). In Zola, certainly, the force of heredity seems to enforce change from behind. However, even when dealing with fiction which displays the process of social change, Auerbach still concerns himself with the existential role of the individual - what he observes in Stendhal and Balzac is 'the entrance of existential and tragic seriousness into realism' (p.481).

He does not maintain that this seriousness is either a necessary or a sufficient condition for realism. His account may only deal with works where this seriousness may be seen, but he does refer many times to what he calls comic realism:

The antique stylistic rule according to which realistic imitation, the description of random everyday life, could only be comic (or at best idyllic), is therefore incompatible with the representation of historical forces as soon as such a representation undertakes to render things concretely; for this procedure entails entering into the random everyday depths of popular life as well as readiness to take seriously whatever is encountered there; and inversely the rule of style can operate only in cases where the writer abandons any attempt to make historical forces concrete or feels no need to do so. (p.44)

What Auerbach says here seems undoubtedly true, and I hope I have not given the impression that Mimesis is not a vastly important work, especially in its analysis of existential choice as an element in literature. However, the book is of little help in our present endeavour, for reasons the above extract makes clear. Auerbach talks of 'the description of random everyday life', but he does not fully explore this

idea?<sup>9</sup> His aim is to see how this representation developed as a vehicle for the presentation of existential realism.

In the discussion of Defoe, Auerbach's two discernible senses of realism may become merged, and hence lead to confusion. In Crusoe, Moll Flanders and Roxana, decisions of major importance have to be made. Should Crusoe leave home? Should Moll marry Robin? Should Roxana sleep with her landlord? However, these seem like crises within the plotting of the fiction, and not any acknowledgement of 'the problem of man's self-orientation.' Defoe's presentation of his characters could also be seen as analogous to the idea of 'fortune breaking in from without', and so this may be a kind of historical realism. However, it is surely inappropriate to see Defoe, or his narrators, as existentialists, and Auerbach's ideological presuppositions only lead to confusion if applied to Defoe. Auerbach shows us how the growth of the Christian view of life made possible the serious treatment of 'random everyday life', but he never fully explores the literary conventions by which this life is represented. His belief that reality lies in moments of gravity and problematic choice is a conception as evaluative as Greenwood's assertion that realism is the presentation of truth. For each of these two writers, the book which achieves realism (and in this sense realism is achieved, not employed, as a technique might be) is that which presents a genuine and correct view of the world. In this sense, any means of presentation is, as it were, neutral, as long as it allows an accurate presentation of the truth.

The current endeavour is organised by rather different principles to these. In order to understand the literary art of Defoe, and to make sense of the critical confusion which surrounds him, I will look at his work in terms of the conventional form it adopts. Whether this is a realistic convention or not remains to be seen, but when I use 'realism' as a critical term I hope to be employing a cognitive, describable literary term, not embracing some view of the human condition. Since this separation

- 
9. One unspoken assumption in Auerbach's argument is that everyday life is indeed random. I feel he does not distinguish adequately between that life which is random, and that which only appears to be so. As we shall see when I discuss the form of the picaresque novel, one common pattern of fiction is the concluding revelation of a plan underlying apparent chaos. This is at least the ostensible form of Moll Flanders amongst many other books, and Auerbach's analysis never really allows such revelation in its full dramatic force. Thus his analysis of realism, or the representation of reality, is of little use in the study of Defoe.



is extremely difficult, yet essential for a coherent analysis of Defoe, it will be useful to describe meanings of 'realism' and 'realistic'. Although Wittgenstein has suggested that one should not demand a close definition of any literary or aesthetic qualities,<sup>10</sup> we may still attempt an ostensive definition of the qualities displayed by realistic works. If this is successful, then the concept should be properly descriptive, a kind of ideal picture of the literary form of a realistic work.

I will confine myself here to realism in prose fiction, though I do not deny the possibilities of realistic verse or drama - the conventions of description would, of course, be different in each case. The evolved sense of 'real' would be opposed to 'non-real' rather than to 'unreal', and though the dogma of the French Naturalists must be examined, my main concern will be with literary practice, not with theorising. In the words of Harry Levin, 'we are dealing with a general tendency, not a specific doctrine'.<sup>11</sup> Also, we must try to avoid the trap which Ian Watt falls into in The Rise of the Novel, when he moves from a descriptive view of realistic fiction to a prescriptive view.<sup>12</sup> Realism is not to be seen as a necessarily desirable trend, only as a useful tool in the description of fiction, and as a necessary critical concept in dealing with Defoe.

In the history of philosophy, the term 'Realism' has undergone at least one significant shift of meaning. In medieval thought, the Realists were those who upheld the reality of universals, the main writers of this school being Aquinas, Abelard and Duns Scotus. Realism was contrasted with Nominalism, which held that universals were no more than mental concepts or words.<sup>13</sup> However, by the time of the 'common-sense' philosophers of the eighteenth century, such as Thomas Reid, Realism had completely reversed its meaning, and had come to mean the belief in the tangible reality of material objects.<sup>14</sup> The reasons behind this change are obscure, and need not detain us here. We need only notice that when

---

10. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations (1953), trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (third edition, Oxford, 1968), paragraphs 66-77.

11. Harry Levin, The Gates of Horn (New York, 1963), p.64.

12. This implicit confusion is well analysed by Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago and London, 1961), p.41. Booth also discusses the widespread tendency to exalt realistic fiction over other kinds, ibid, pp.23-67.

13. See Gordon Leff, Medieval Thought: St. Augustine to Ockham, Penguin ed., (Harmondsworth, 1958), pp.49, 104-114, 259, 260. See also Raymond Williams, Keywords, loc.cit..

14. For literary students, the most outstanding example of such Realism is the episode related by Boswell where Johnson refutes Berkeley's idealism by directing a kick at a stone. See James Boswell, Life of Johnson, pp.333-334.



41

the term first began to be applied to literature - probably first so used by Schiller and Schlegel around 1800 - realism is being used in the later sense, as a contrast to idealism.<sup>15</sup> The term seems to have had its first literary application in England much later than elsewhere, in an article on Balzac in the Westminster Review in 1853:

Realism is confounded with materialism by writers who have never been able to distinguish between classicism and conventionalism, and is represented as being the art of copying external nature with correctness, when analysis of human character and motives, and the observation of mental phenomena, form the very foundation of the system.<sup>16</sup>

It is significant that even this first usage should be an attempt to clear up existing confusion, for we have seen that the use of 'realism' has never been particularly clear. Also interesting in this connection, albeit by denial, is the association of 'realism' and materialism.

Many writers have suggested that the etymological base of 'realism' in 'res' shows the explicit connection between realism and 'things' - usually in this case a reference to the insignificant paraphernalia of the world. Though this pattern of argument is highly suspect, it is a useful starting point.<sup>17</sup> Notice, also, how one of the earliest realist manifestoes should declare itself to be 'an attempt to apply Feurbach's ideas to the solution of the fundamental problems of aesthetics'.<sup>18</sup> Early usage of 'realism', therefore, seems to indicate a notion that realist or realistic works deal with the characteristics of the observable external world. Such scientific pretensions, as we shall see, were the essence of the case for defending the unstinting Naturalism of Émile Zola and his contemporaries.

- 
15. I can find no clear account of this change in meaning. For similar puzzlement, along with other examples of early usage, see Wellek, 'The Concept of Realism in Literary Scholarship,' pp. 225-6; and Stern, On Realism, p.38.
16. Quoted by Robert G. Davis, 'The Sense of the Real in English Fiction,' Comparative Literature, III (1951), p.214. Richard Stang, The Theory of the Novel in England 1850-1870 (New York and London, 1959), p.148, refers to an article in Fraser's Magazine (January 1851) where Thackeray is called the 'chief of the Realist school', though the description remains unexplained. The earliest references given in NED are to Emerson in 1856 (where realism means materialism) and to Turner in 1857 (where realism means grotesquerie).
17. See Harry Levin, 'What is Realism?' Comparative Literature, III (1951) pp. 193-199.
18. N.G. Chernishevsky, Life and Aesthetics (1853), quoted in George J. Becker (ed.), Documents of Modern Literary Realism (Princeton, 1963), p.46. Becker's collection contains many of the source documents I will refer to, and it will afterwards be referred to in the text as DMLR.

The literary movement known as Realism or Naturalism can best be dated from the publication of the first of Zola's Rougon-Macquart series in 1871, lasting until 1893, the year which saw the death of both Taine and Maupassant and Zola's failure to gain entry to the French Academy. Before 1893, the French novel, especially in the hands of Balzac and Stendhal and Flaubert, was the most significant area of treatment of everyday life in prose fiction. In his vast series of novels, collectively known as La Comédie humaine, Balzac chronicles ordinary life in France during the revolutionary, Napoleonic and Restoration times. As is well known, his efforts were inspired by the historical novel as developed by Sir Walter Scott,<sup>19</sup> and one of Balzac's aims is to reveal the largely materialist view of the world adopted by his characters. As Harry Levin says, 'it is Balzac's zeal for tracing financial relationships that links cause to effect, plot to character, and volume to volume in the Comédie humaine.'<sup>20</sup> Balzac was not given to theorising about literature, or even to critical comment, but in the Avant-propos to the 1842 collected edition of his works, he says:

En lisant les sèches et rebutantes  
nomenclatures de faits appelées histoires,  
qui ne s'est aperçu que les écrivains  
ont oublié, dans tous les temps, en  
Égypte, en Perse, en Grèce, à Rome, de  
nous donner l'histoire des mœurs.<sup>21</sup>

Balzac is here likening the novelist to the social historian, or, more precisely, the historian of manners or moral behaviour. In his case, this leads to a concentration on financial behaviour, or perhaps moral transactions, and such concerns dominate what is usually called realistic fiction. As we shall see, Defoe's concerns with money allow him to be seen as realistic in this sense, and the idea of the transaction is certainly central to his fiction.

Similarly, Flaubert cared deeply about the historical approach, and about the socially descriptive qualities of his fiction. As with Balzac, he avoids committing himself fully to Naturalism, and, in fact, develops an aesthetic theory of his own, emphasising clarity and objectivity. While writing Madame Bovary, he wrote:

---

19. This indebtedness is documented in all treatments of these writers. See The Gates of Horn, chapter II; or The Age of Realism, ed. F.W.J. Hemmings, Pelican edition (Harmondsworth, 1974), pp.38-43.

20. The Gates of Horn, p.199.

21. Oeuvres Complètes de M. De Balzac (Paris, 1842), I, p.12.

I believe my Bovary is going to go all right, but I am hampered by my propensity for metaphor, which definitely dominates me too much. I am devoured by comparisons as one is by lice, and I spend all my time squashing them; my sentences swarm with them. 22

Flaubert attempts to find a style which does not draw attention to itself, which is sufficiently prosaic to do justice to the apparently observable external world, and which we can see as a contrast to Defoe's biblically-derived syntax<sup>and</sup> style. He displays great concern with the historical accuracy of the 'background' to the life of Frédéric Moreau, a desire to remove the commentating author from the scene, and, as in the quotation above, a desire for a prose style which is consonant with seemingly neutral description.<sup>23</sup> It is not required here to deal in any detail with the procedure of Balzac and Flaubert (and Stendhal). Though Flaubert's demands for impersonality and purity of rhetoric were an important influence on Henry James, and, hence, formative of a lot of twentieth-century critical thinking, he presents no consistent theory of realism. Flaubert is exhorting authors - or at least himself - to write in a particular way; he is not trying to describe the technical practice of his contemporaries. Though I shall refer to the work of Balzac and Flaubert later, for the moment I shall concern myself with the more rigorous theories of realism advocated by Zola and his contemporaries,<sup>24</sup> to see if any concept emerges which will help us understand Defoe.

It was mentioned earlier that there was a case for the defence of Zola. Why should defence be necessary? The main reason is that the debate about justifying so-called Naturalistic literature was one of the very few literary debates to make any impact on the larger public. Though Madame Bovary had provoked a court case in France in 1857, the French were certainly more sympathetic to the 'new' form than were the British. As late as 1889, the English translator of Zola, Mr. Henry Vizetelly,

---

22. Gustav Flaubert, Oeuvres Complètes, Correspondance (Paris, 1926-1933), III, 79. Quoted in DMLR, p.92. The translation is Becker's.

23. 'When literature has the precision of results of an exact science, that's going some.' Flaubert, Correspondance, III, 285-6;

24. The possibilities of the impersonality and purity of art sought by Flaubert and James are discussed thoroughly by Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, pp. 67-116.

44

was twice tried and was eventually sentenced to three months imprisonment.<sup>25</sup> It seems that Zola's description of the squalid horror of working class life in the Rougon-Macquart novels had proved too strong for many readers. In a debate in the House of Commons in 1888, a Mr. S. Smith (Flintshire) warns the members that 'nothing more diabolical had ever been written by the pen of man. These novels were only fit for swine, and their constant perusal must turn the mind into something akin to a sty' (extract from 'Hansard', DMLR, pp. 353-4). In a similar vein, the newspapers of the day applaud the sentence on Vizetelly. The Times states that 'the evil wrought by literature of this character is immense'; the Western Morning News tells readers that 'there can be no question that Zola is filthy in the extreme, and obscene to the point of bestiality'; and the Star is even more explicit, 'It is true that Rabelais is obscene, that Chaucer is coarse, and that Boccaccio's ladies and gentlemen are all too frank. But M. Zola's La Terre has none of the charm, the humour, the style which redeems the works of the authors named. It is simply unrelieved and morbid filth' (DMLR, pp. 373, 381, 376).<sup>26</sup>

Though the reaction in France was less hysterical - the term 'Réalisme' had been current for much longer there, and so had gained some institutional respectability<sup>27</sup> - the strength of abuse illustrated is, perhaps, pre-empted by the defensive manoeuvres in Zola's criticism. In his Essay, 'Naturalism in the Theatre', he attempts to align himself with an already valued tradition, and to play down the novelty of his work:

- 
25. See National Vigilance Association, 'Pernicious Literature', DMLR, pp. 351-2.
26. The Victorian reaction to Naturalism is shown at length in an article in the Fortnightly Review in 1885 - W.S.Lilly, 'The New Naturalism' (DMLR, pp. 274 - 295). The continual attack on Naturalism in England may account for the surprisingly small influence it had. Before the end of the century, the only works which show any awareness of Zola are the novels of George Moore, the early works of Somerset Maugham (particularly Liza of Lambeth) and perhaps the 'Five Towns' novels of Arnold Bennett.
27. In 1826, one writer describes 'this literary doctrine which gains ground every day and leads to a faithful imitation not of the masterpieces of art but of the originals offered by nature...could very well be called realism'. Quoted by Elbert B.O.Borgerhoff, 'Realism and Kindred Words: Their Use as Terms of Literary Criticism in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century', PMLA, 53 (1938), 837-43.



45

The naturalist school, by the very admission of those who make sport and attack it, rests...on indestructible foundations. It is not the caprice of one man or the collective folly of a group; it has sprung from the eternal core of things, from the necessity felt by every writer to take nature as his basis.

(DMLR, p.197)

He pursues a kind of orthodox respectability by tracing, after the fashion of Taine, the evolution of two separate kinds of writing visible in the history of French literature. He sees literature as evolving alongside science, and detects in Diderot the beginning of a line of empirical and truthful imaginative writing 'making continual war on the worm-eaten edifice of conventions and rules' (DMLR, p.200). However, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, certain writers, confused by 'the emotional and disturbed influence of Rousseau' (DMLR, p.201), lapsed into melancholy lyricism. In terms of the novel, this expressed itself in the pernicious escapism of Hugo, Dumas père, and Georges Sand. However, the source of the proper, naturalistic novel is spotted by Zola in the work of Balzac, Stendhal and Flaubert. By evoking this distinguished company, Zola wants not only to show romanticism as a temporary meander in the evolutionary course of the real novel, but also to justify his own endeavour by showing its legitimate forebears in valued writers. Though Zola makes no mention of Defoe, we should remember Rousseau's own praise for Defoe, and his insistence that Crusoe was a book of great importance. This would seem to place Defoe with the Romantics!

It is significant that Zola always talks in the plural. He may present himself as a spokesman, and an inventor of critical terminology, but his creative practice is part of a corporate effort. Just as in the Rougon-Macquart series he traces the formative role of heredity on his characters, so in his polemical criticism he shows the genetic development of the qualities he calls Naturalist. Since the characteristics of the antecedents determine the characteristics of the descendants, in Zola's mechanistic psychology, the prestigious forebears of the Naturalist novel guarantee its quality. He adopts Taine's concepts of race and milieu to the study of his own literature; race being the hereditary line through Diderot, Balzac, Stendhal, Flaubert and the de Goncourt brothers; milieu being the fiction of empirical concern. The



third term Taine uses, moment, covers the current social situation in France, and so Zola's fiction becomes defined as the examination, by empirical means, of contemporary history, in the tradition of La Comédie humaine. Though Zola does not use this terminology, the influence of Taine and Taine's kind of analysis is obvious in the genetic inquiry carried on in the novels. His suggested antecedents are all French, and he makes no claim to lineage from Defoe.

The reason behind Zola's claim to legitimate heritage is the desire for prestige. His other method of attaining respectability for his fiction is to claim that the novels have the same relation to truth as he sees science as having. In 'The Experimental Novel', he claims that his procedure as a writer is naturalist in the way that the medical experiments of Claude Bernard are naturalist:

...the novelist is both observer and experimenter. The observer in him presents data as he has observed them, determines the point of departure, establishes the solid ground on which his characters will stand and his phenomena take place. Then the experimenter appears and institutes the experiment, that is, sets the characters of a particular story in motion, in order to show that the series of events therein will be those demanded by the determinism of the phenomena under study. (DMLR, p.166)

If we take this as a description of Naturalism, or even as a definition, given some scientific (or quasi-scientific) importance to impress a doubting public, then the conception of Naturalism involved is cognitive rather than evaluative. Zola describes the methodology of the Naturalist writer, and any novel seeming to employ this method is a Naturalist novel. He elaborates on this when he says 'our great study is there, on the reciprocal influence of society upon the individual, and of the individual on society' (DMLR, p. 174). Naturalism, then can be recognised by the approach to society it offers, an approach visible throughout Diderot, Balzac, etc. This definition of Zola's is similar to one offered more recently by a commentator on a different period, who says, 'an author inclines to realism insofar as he inclines to present his characters in a known environment socially and economically conditioned in a given epoch'.<sup>28</sup>

---

28. Margaret Schluach, Antecedents of the English Novel 1400-1600 (Warsaw and London, 1963), p. 6.

If the references to Claude Bernard and other scientific experimenters are only to be taken as crowd-pleasing analogy, then they are pardonably inexact and imprecise. However, they should not distract attention from the central idea that Zola is orientating literature towards the positivist, realistic conception of experiment, rather than towards the romantic or the idealistic.<sup>29</sup>

Unfortunately, Zola means the scientific model as something rather more than simple analogy. He is not only trying to show how his approach is different to the romantic or idealistic, he is trying to show it to be superior to any others. His genetic notion of the development of the novel - Naturalism appearing after the feeble predecessors have failed - necessarily demands that his approach is an advance on what has gone before. The scientific reference is thus more than analogy; it is a genuine claim towards a teleology of the novel:

The writer and the scientist have had the same task. Both have had to replace abstractions with realities, empirical formulas with rigorous analysis. Thus no more abstract characters in books, no more lying inventions, no more absolutes, but real characters with true histories, and the relativity of everyday life. (DMLR, p. 201)

The new representation of everyday life is not just a change, it shows the triumph of truth over falsehood. In Zola's criticism, the imagery of battle appears frequently: 'The romantic movement was definitely only a minor skirmish... the age belongs to the naturalists, to the direct descendants of Diderot, whose solid battalions came later and were to found a true state' (DMLR, p. 202). In this modern battle of the books, victory goes to the most deserving side. The romanticists 'go off on a false scent', are 'overexcited dreamers', collectively suffering from a 'divagation of minds' (DMLR, pp. 201-2). Zola sees romanticism as a departure from the proper development of art. Only the Naturalist can found the 'true state', and such a connection with truth reveals the value of the Naturalist movement. Instead of being a base pandering to the lowest elements, in search of pecuniary gain - as the prosecutors of Vizetelly claimed - the Naturalist novel is claimed to be the most highly evolved literary form of all.

---

29. To see another imprecise scientific analogy being used as support, think of the famous scientific analogy of our own century: '...the action which takes place when a bit of finely filiated platinum is introduced into a chamber containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide'. T.S.Eliot, The Sacred Wood (second edition, London, 1950), pp. 47-59. Eliot's analogy may be open to severe criticism on many grounds, but it seems to me to be a piece of rather swashbuckling bravado, rather than the seriously intended suggestions of Zola.

We saw earlier that the evaluative concept of realism in Greenwood's article amounted to the unhelpful tautology that any work which was true was realistic. Zola's conception of realism is equally evaluative in that he identifies realism as the only way to achieve truth in fiction. The realistic novel can be identified by its empirical, experimental approach (in which case 'realism' is a descriptive term), and by the results of this experimentation (when 'realism' becomes a term of praise). However, the main evaluative aspect of Zola's discussion is his elevation of the realistic work to being the most subtle and successful of all literary forms. This becomes a prescription for artistic endeavour, not a description of the activities of writers. He justifies this huge assertion by giving a cognitive account of truth. Truth, he says, lies in showing how the action of society and heredity reduces people to animality. The reduction of the noble human to la bête humaine is the theme and dramatic process of all Zola's fiction. This, he says, is the highest of all themes, the most true of all statements about the human condition, and it can only be accomplished by the realistic novel. It will be immediately clear that Defoe's novels display no such statements and so are not naturalistic. The survival of Crusoe and Moll looks much more like an idealisation or triumph than a debasement.

Because Zola moves from a description of the Naturalist movement to a kind of evaluative propaganda for it, he moves from the analysis of a cognitive concept to the propounding of an aesthetic theory. All genuine works of art, he says, somehow approximate to the condition of the realist novel. Of course, there are great difficulties in his argument. If the artist is essentially an observer or experimenter, he initiates very little, and so Zola pays very little attention to the role of form or imagination or symbol. Also, the determinism, which is essential to the development of theme and drama within his novels, has similar importance in his criticism. He sees all previous literature as being either conducive to the realist novel, or, otherwise, a frivolous aside, and so assesses all previous writing in a curiously teleological way.<sup>30</sup>

---

30. The teleological approach is seen in many writers other than the Naturalists. 'Historians of fiction have usually limited their interest in fiction before Defoe to whatever elements they can cite as having "led" towards the modern novel; and even Walter Allen, while insisting that there were no novels before Defoe, tends to imply that authors before were trying (and failing) to produce novels,' Walter R. Davis, Idea and Act in Elizabethan Fiction (Princeton, 1969). The reference to Walter Allen is to The English Novel: A Short Critical History (London, 1954), pp.25-6. One standard history of the novel which exalts the growth of realism in this way is Arthur E. Baker, The History of the English Novel (London, 1934), volumes II and III.

Indeed, it is highly doubtful if he has any sense of aesthetic values at all. He certainly pays no attention to the imaginative, creative function of the author, and sees only the novel as capable of the proper job of literature.<sup>31</sup>

Zola's position, then, becomes propagandist and non-descriptive when he starts to defend his own practice. Does this mean that it is of no real value in our search for a cognitive concept of realism? I think not. It seems possible to accept a part of Naturalist theory without being compelled to swallow the whole thing. Zola's remarks about the novel as a way of depicting the relationship between the individual and society seem pertinent in discussion of Defoe. His concern with accurate depiction of lower class life does not of itself demand the deterministic view he takes. The attempt to show how the poor live, without resort to satire, panegyric or caricature is theory-neutral. It is evaluative only in the sense that the society depicted is seen as worthy of depiction, and only as an accident of combative critical history does this become a duty rather than a possibility. If realism is seen as a reaction to romanticism (or idealism), as a much-needed return to honesty and truth, then it is likely to be seen by its advocates as the most valuable of literary forms. If, on the other hand, realism is seen as only one of many possible fictional approaches or techniques, no connection with the truth is implied. It is this latter course which seems most useful. The formulation of realism as the tendency to portray individuals within a recognisable social and economic environment is, of course, a purely cognitive formulation, and one which usefully applies to Defoe. It does not imply that the pursuit of this one technique is any more worthwhile in itself that is, say, the presentation of events within the context of symbol and allusion. Nor does it demand that realism is necessarily connected with any particular conception of man or society, though empirical inquiry may well show that realistic novels have actually been positivist in theme as well as technique. This remains

---

31. Zola's Naturalist theory is also open to criticism for its conception of science. The claim that truth is to be found by observation and experiment depends on a naive realist metaphysic and epistemology, and on a simplistic view of the status of observable data. Zola never takes into account the problems involved in 'matching' the described phenomena in the novel and the observable phenomena of the world. I should make it clear here that what I say of Zola also applies to the American Naturalist Movement (Howells, Dreiser etc.,) and 'socialist' realism (Gorky etc.).



to be seen. It would be perfectly possible to claim that Defoe placed his characters in an economic environment, but that he still revealed other, non-materialist, values as well. This elaboration will not form a workable and all-inclusive infallible definition. The nearest to an exact definition I will give is to state that the realistic novel can be detected by its description of events within a recognisable historically precise situation, and by its avoidance of overt temporal distortion. What this second qualification involves will become clearer later, but, for the moment, let that be the basis of a 'blurred picture' of realism.<sup>32</sup>

\*\*\*\*\*

The realistic novel is often accused of being 'mere' reportage.<sup>33</sup> Though this is pejorative, and hence evaluative, it does serve to illustrate the way in which the realistic novel denies its fictional status. The author of the realistic novel normally takes pains to try to delude the reader into seeing the fictional world as factual, as an authentic report of the known world. In the most extreme cases, this desire expresses itself as pseudo-autobiography, an enduringly popular form, ranging from Robinson Crusoe to a great success of recent years, Henri Charrière's Papillon. Even when not passed off as genuine autobiography, the realistic novel deals with characters who share the known characteristics of human beings. Of course, it is commonplace to assert that writers may be only partially successful in describing their characters, and we do talk coherently of 'wooden' or 'lifeless' characters. However, before we can do so, we have to recognise that such characterisations are attempts to portray human beings; otherwise the criticism is invalid. A novel which attempts to portray accurately the behaviour or thought-processes of human beings is a realistic novel (in this sense): the success of that attempt to portray is another matter.

Apart from the pseudo-autobiography, this presentation of recognisable characters takes many forms. Even when we are told we are dealing with a fiction, the proximity to truth can still be maintained - 'Every intelligent reader will, at first sight, perceive I have not deviated from nature, in the facts, which are all true in the main, although the circumstances are altered and disguised to avoid personal satire'.<sup>34</sup>

---

32. See Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, paragraph 77; for the meaning of 'blurred picture'.

33. See the article in the Westminster Review in 1853, introducing the term to English criticism, referred to supra.

34. Tobias Smollett, The Adventures of Roderick Random (1748) ed. Paul-Gabriel Boucé (Oxford, 1979), p.xlv.



This attempt to minimise the degree of aesthetic intrusion is not always successful. There have been occasions when a writer's attempts at caricature have even been taken as accurate portrayal - this is much the kind of thing that happened to Defoe with The Shortest Way with Dissenters. In any case, we may wish to say that all novels, irrespective of style or form, must present characters, and that these characters must interest readers by their resemblances to human beings. Certainly, those novels which attempt to interest us in non-human characters (such as Black Beauty or The Inheritors) almost invariably present such characters in recognisable near-human terms.<sup>35</sup> However, the specific approach of the realistic novel is to deal with its characters in terms of reported fact, to present its events as they would most accurately be reported were they true, and to minimise the attention drawn to the conventions by which speech, thought and action are reported in fiction. The realistic novel asks its readers to forget that they are reading a novel, and one way of doing this is to deny that the work in question is a novel at all. The denial may be explicit, as in pseudo-autobiography, or it may take the form of carrying on the narrative by non-fictional means like letters, diaries, eye-witness accounts, or ostensibly impartial reports. The realistic novel, then, becomes as impartial as (and as partial as) a journalistic report.

This impartiality is what is often meant by the impersonality of the author in realistic fiction. The author's own personality (or in the case of pseudo-autobiography, the actual author's personality) is suppressed in favour of a less obviously tempered account of the facts involved in the narrative. In the polemical words of Flaubert:

Let us always bear in mind that  
impersonality is a sign of strength.  
Let us absorb the objective; let  
it circulate in us, until it is  
externalised in such a way that no  
one can understand this marvelous  
chemistry. Our hearts should only  
serve to understand the hearts of  
others. Let us be magnifying  
mirrors of external truth. 36

---

35. At the time of writing, two of the current best-sellers are Watership Down and Shardik both by Richard Adams. They deal, respectively, with the domestic lives of rabbits and bears, and do so in the near-human terms of other animal books. In as much as the terms of reference are always human those works are realistic. Their study seems still to be anthropological rather than zoological. The same could, of course, be said of animal fables in general, including Animal Farm.

36. Flaubert, Correspondence, III, 383-4; DMLR pp. 93-4.



The image of the mirror is also used by Stendhal and George Eliot, and is the most common metaphor used to describe the practice of the committed realist.<sup>37</sup> The notion of the supremely objective author is fraught with the metaphysical and epistemological difficulties mentioned earlier, and it ignores the intrusiveness of the rhetorical features of fiction. However, all we need see here is that any novel tends to be realistic in as much as it tends to the suppression of the idiosyncratic views of the author (not necessarily of the narrator), in favour of reportorial technique. Such is obviously the case with the pseudo-autobiographies presented by Defoe.

One symptom of this technique is that the register and tenor of the narration is either the same register used by the characters, or one which would be understood by them. One way of securing this uniformity of register is to have the narrator as a character involved in the drama of the unfolding events, such as Conrad uses the narrating figure of Marlow in Lord Jim, Heart of Darkness and elsewhere. Of course, Conrad's technique does more than simply make the narrative seem more authentic - it heightens the moral ambiguities of behaviour for one thing. However, it shares the approach of many other twentieth century novels - The Sound and the Fury, Mrs. Dalloway, or The Turn of the Screw, for instance - in allowing the characters to function without explicit authorial intrusion. It is worth noticing that there are many authors who feel no need to impose this restraint upon themselves, with perhaps the most well-known being Thackeray or Hardy. There is no reason to assume that the reticent author is a superior technical device to the intrusive author; we need only notice that those authors who butt in, as it were, are reminding their readers of the conventionality of their fiction, and so are not maintaining realistic technique.<sup>38</sup> A case of the two different approaches occurring side by side in the same novel can be seen in Bleak House. In Esther Summerson's contribution, we have the maintenance of narrative by ostensibly non-fictional means (the diary) and we see the identity of register between character and narration. However, when the novel presents unattributed narration, there is an implied intrusive author, selecting details for our attention, knowing

---

37. Stendhal: '...a poet is a mirror which reflects every image and retains the impression of none' (review of Rossini, Journal de Paris, 1826). Quoted by Hemmings, The Age of Realism, p.67. The more famous simile of the mirror on the highway occurs in Le Rouge et le noir, part II, ch.19. Eliot: 'The mirror is doubtless defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed, the reflection faint or confused; but I feel as much bound to tell you as precisely as I can what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box narrating my experience on oath.' (Adam Bede, Ch.XVII; DMLR, p. 113).

38. There always seems to be a danger in discussion of this kind of over-rating the value of the withdrawn author. For an account of the history of the withdrawn author, and of critical attitudes towards him, see Both, Rhetoric of Fiction, pp. 67-86.

more than any one of the characters could possibly know. Such an implied omniscient author actually breaks into the main body of the narrative on occasions, as an explicit commentator (e.g. on the death of Jo, chapter 47). However, there is no damaging sense of disunity involved in the mingling of the two kinds of narration. Though Dickens' gifts seem to be better expressed through the omniscient narrator than through the character of Esther Summerson, he combines both realistic and non-realistic techniques as means of conveying his various themes.

The intrusive narrator in Dickens selects the most thematically relevant details of any scene for our attention. This kind of obvious selection is at odds with the technique of the realistic novel, where detail is presented with the appearance of randomness. Of course, this selection is not as arbitrary as it is made to appear; it is a carefully contrived technique which only fortuitiously takes on the air of spontaneity - 'merely corroborative detail, intended to give artistic verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative'.<sup>39</sup> The appearance of verifiability given by the accumulation of circumstantial evidence shows us another main characteristic of the realistic novel - that it is set in a particular place at a particular time. In a minimal sense, the realistic novel must follow the sensible form of time and space, and must not disrupt the common-sense features of perception. A novel in which two people were both taller than each other, or in which two events both happened before each other would not be a realistic novel, even if such a thing could be described in fiction. However, more importantly than this, the realistic novel deals with precise, described times and places. A typical opening might be, 'One cloudy but luminous day, towards four in the afternoon on April the first, 192-'.<sup>40</sup> The date, as here, may be withheld. The place, as in Jude the Obscure, may be disguised. However, in each case we are aware that a particular locale is involved, even if we have trouble in matching it with the known external world. The typical realistic novels of Balzac and Zola are firmly placed in nineteenth-century France, and location is typical of the realistic novel as a whole.

---

39. The words are Pooh-Bah's, The Mikado, Act II. The Savoy Operas by Sir W.S. Gilbert (1926), one volume edition, (London, 1972), p. 47.

40. The Gift, by Vladimir Nabokov, trans. Michael Scammell (London, 1966) p.11. This is the opening sentence of the novel, whose hero, a novelist, later says, 'I must use such a scene to start a good thick old-fashioned novel' (p.11). Such tampering with the forms of the novel is, as we shall see, essentially non-realistic.

Think here of the use of nomenclature in the novel. At one extreme we have the overtly symbolic use of names, such as we get with Christian and the other characters in Pilgrim's Progress and The Life and Death of Mr. Badman. Such symbolic naming, or typification, is used extensively throughout the history of the novel by, amongst others, Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, Thackeray, Trollope and Dickens. The attempt to typify the attributes of characters by the use of significant names (e.g. Grandison, Abraham Adams, Roderick Random, etc.) is a move away from realism into symbol. The artist's power to organise and shape his material is being made more prominent. It has been said that Defoe's characters are given insignificant names, as part of his realistic technique, but more recent scholarship has made this a point of contention.<sup>41</sup> We shall return to this later.

Spatial and historical change can certainly occur within any given realistic novel. L'Éducation sentimentale covers a number of years in the history of Paris, and Eugénie Grandet requires a certain amount of travelling on the part of Père Grandet. Only when a novel disrupts the normal sequence of time does it cease to be realistic. An obvious example of this would be the extreme distortions in The Secret Agent, where we become interested in the shifting time for reasons other than verisimilitude. In the realistic novel, the only way to accommodate time shifts is to involve a central character in retrospection, as in David Copperfield, or to explain the events which occurred prior to the dramatic event which opened the novel, as in many detective novels, or in a slightly different way, in Paul Scott's Staying On (1977). Realism is also sacrificed when the specific place described is merely a vehicle for satire or some other mode, as in Gulliver's Travels or Erewhon.<sup>42</sup>

One technique dependent on the solidity of time and place which is characteristic of the realistic novel is the introduction of verifiable historical material within a fictional context. In War and Peace, Tolstoy

---

41. The traditional view is expressed by Ian Watt, 'The Naming of Characters in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding,' RES, XXV (1949), 322-338.

42. One recent critic of Gulliver's Travels makes a remark which is interesting in this context: 'Gulliver's Travels established that connection between experimental science and the more repulsive or animal aspects of human behaviour which Victorian critics associated with the French realists', R.G. Davis 'The Sense of the Real in English Fiction,' p.206. I should be stressed that this connection is retrospective; Victorian critics did not see the two as connected. And I would want to stress the very great differences in technique between Swift and Zola.



analyses the situation of the Russian gentry during the Napoleonic wars, and he includes historical characters and events within his narrative. Think too of the way Alexander Solzhenitsyn has included the character of Stalin into The First Circle (1968), or Anthony Powell and Evelyn Waugh have given almost social histories of the 1940's and 1950's within their longer novel sequences. As we shall see, Defoe uses this technique extensively. The historical verifiability of certain parts of these works imparts the air of authenticity (a deliberately vague phrase to cover a vague process) to the fictional parts. Another similar feature would be the use of particular pieces of legislation in fiction. For instance, to understand fully Felix Holt the Radical, Adam Bede, Jude the Obscure, The Man of Property, Oliver Twist, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, or Mary Barton, it is necessary to be cognisant with many English statutes covering property or marriage in the nineteenth century. These novels directly dramatise legal issues, by using legal restraint as one of the opponents the central characters must battle against, showing how each of these novels depends greatly on a precise rendering of a social environment.

As a contrast to the social and historical basis of the realistic novel, think of those novels which depend on a purely literary heritage. In recent years Defoe's best known fiction has been re-interpreted in Adrian Mitchell's Man Friday, Michel Tournier's Friday: or The Other Island, and Muriel Spark's Robinson.<sup>43</sup> Further examples of this kind of literary situation would be <sup>the</sup> relationship between C.S. Lewis's Voyage to Venus and Paradise Lost; William Golding's Lord of the Flies and Captain Marryat's The Coral Island; Nabokov's Pale Fire and the conventional critical essay; John Fowles's The French Lieutenant's Woman and the Victorian novel; even Tristram Shandy and Sentimental fiction. Another instance of Defoe's work being treated in this way would be the treatment of Moll Flanders and Colonel Jack in John Barth's The Sot-Weed Factor. Each of the later writers here is in some way examining the assumptions made in the form of the previous work, and so is ceasing to see his characters realistically.<sup>44</sup> That is to say, the environment within which the characters work is not a social and economic one, but a literary one. There is no attempt to convince us that the world we are seeing in these books is our own, rather

---

43. Another novel dependent on Crusoe might be Golding's Pincher Martin. See J.I. Biles and C.R. Kropf, 'The Cleft Rock of Conversion,' Studies in the Literary Imagination, II (1969), 17-43.

44. The way in which any given work becomes part of a literary tradition, and how effectively it is changed by this is analysed in Jorge Luis Borges, 'Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote,' Labyrinths, Penguin edition, Harmondsworth, 1970), pp. 67-72.



56

it is a world organised by, and only recognisable by, literary reference. Think of the way in which Joyce uses a particular time and place in Ulysses - 16th June, 1904, Dublin - yet handles this scene in a wholly non-realistic way. The ostensible present in early twentieth-century Dublin becomes a palimpsest of mythic references, and the literary form moves away from the realistic towards the mock-epic and mock-heroic.

The preceding pages may often have seemed too much like an annotated catalogue of reading, but that may be an unavoidable hazard of ostensive definition. Two notions so far have been under attack. Firstly, the association of 'realistic' with unscrupulousness and shadiness, which appeared in much early criticism of Defoe, has been discarded as being both unnecessary and unhelpful, and has been seen to arise from the debate surrounding Zola. Secondly, the claim that a 'realistic' work tells us the truth, or explores the human condition in a satisfactory way has also been rejected as being too demanding and too overtly moralistic. What remains is the claim that a work is realistic if it portrays recognisably human characters in a recognisable social and economic environment, using techniques which we accept as the most neutral means of presenting the known world. To say that Defoe's work is realistic, then, is to say that it employs the techniques described, while avoiding overt attention to style and form. We shall see the problems in this definition in a moment, but notice here that it is a 'period' concept, in Wellek's sense.

Wellek's own definition of realism is 'the objective representation of contemporary social reality'.<sup>45</sup> The obvious difficulty in this is the meaning of 'contemporary'. Does Wellek mean contemporary to the reader or to the writer? If the former, then the idea seems unworkably ephemeral - could any novel ever deal with contemporary issues in any precise sense? If he means the latter, then his assertion becomes empirically inaccurate. I do not think he would wish to have to rule out Gorky's autobiographical trilogy as non-realistic just because it dealt with the past, and the same would have to apply to all the novels of Balzac, Stendhal, Flaubert and, of course, Defoe. Taken literally, this reading of Wellek's concept would demand that a realistic novel had to be written in the present tense, and as such his concept would generate only a very small canon of realistic fiction.

By leaving out 'contemporary' from the present definition, I

---

45. Wellek, Concepts of Criticism, p. 253.

may have avoided one problem, but the use of 'recognisable' brings in others. In what sense is, say, Alexander Solzhenitsyn's labour camp recognisable <sup>to</sup> ~~by~~ middle-class British academics? In what sense could the social world of Lady Chatterley's Lover be recognisable to a British jury in 1960? Or, for that matter, how recognisable to any of us is Crusoe's island or Moll's London underworld? Put bluntly, what we recognise as a representation of the real world in fiction depends entirely on how we see the real world in fact. Any conception of literary realism cannot avoid the ideological undertones of the word 'real'.<sup>46</sup> A reader can only call a book realistic if it accords with his own view of the world (though only in the broadest terms). The earlier discussion of Mimesis showed Auerbach's conception of realism to be ideological in that only works which displayed Auerbach's view of existential choice could be seen as realistic. So too, when Margaret Schlus<sup>ch</sup> says that 'an author inclines to realism insofar as he inclines to present his characters in a known environment socially and economically conditioned in a given epoch',<sup>47</sup> we see the ideology of her statement in its omissions. She assumes that it is non-realistic to show any conditioning other than the social or economic. If these two terms have any discriminative meaning, then she is seeing realism as materialist rather than theistic. The reality she recognises has no place for the Providential intrusions found in epic, nor has it any place for exclusive, isolated studies of individual behaviour. Also, Zola's emphasis on heredity would have to be seen as non-realistic. I am not going to disagree with her that reality is conditioned only socially and economically, or to enter into argument about whether we recognise reality or construct it.<sup>48</sup> However, we can see that it is this materialistic sense of realism which has been most often associated with Defoe. His fiction has been seen as realistic precisely in the sense that it is seen as a move away from a medieval, theistic view of the world towards a more modern, materialist conception of it.

---

46. I use the word 'ideology' here with some caution, and base my definition of it on the sense developed by Karl Mannheim. See his Ideology and Utopia (London, 1936).

47. See her Antecedents of the English Novel 1400-1600, p.6.

48. For a discussion of this issue, see Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality (London, 1967), passim.

It may be rather optimistic to talk so blithely of a modern conception of the world, as if there were not many such conceptions existing simultaneously. In any age there may be one dominant view, but there are likely to be many subsidiary conceptions. Even as optimistic a writer as E.M.W. Tillyard is forced to admit this:

My object then is to extract and expound the most ordinary beliefs about the constitution of the world as pictured in the Elizabethan age...  
...I must warn readers that some facts are only approximate. There were many variations of opinion about the way the universe was constituted impossible to record in a short book. 49.

Indeed, Tillyard's rather monolithic view of Elizabethan thinking has been very seriously questioned by many more recent scholars, who have shown the great diversity of understandings simultaneously present.<sup>50</sup>

What, then are we to make of the assertion that Defoe's work is or is not realistic? Is this<sup>a</sup> simply ideological discussion, informing us only of the world-views of the protagonists in the debate? Or does the whole debate indicate something about Defoe's own work, which makes it peculiarly amenable to such discussion? I am inclined towards the latter view since, as we shall see in the discussions of Defoe's novels, he characteristically presents us with two world views, which are regularly in conflict. As the Prefaces to his novels claim, the apparent structure of his books is Providential. However, in each one we can detect the conflicting operation of a more materialistic sensibility, and the organising power of Providence is never wholly effective.

Let us remember for the moment, then, that Defoe clearly uses most of the techniques which have been accepted as realistic. He is famed for his accumulation of apparently irrelevant details; his characters are placed within a recognisable historical context, with specific references to names and dates and places; and he seems acutely aware of the economic constraints upon his protagonists. If his fiction only, or incontrovertibly, displayed these characteristics, then there would be no need for debate. However, many modern critics have raised issues which put these

---

49. E.M.W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture (1943, Penguin ed., Harmondsworth, 1963), pp. 8-9.

50. See, for example, Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic (London, 1971), passim.

features in doubt. As well as showing the economic constraints upon his narrators, Defoe emphasises, albeit sporadically, their spiritual status. In Crusoe, at least, there is evidence for a wealth of literary references to spiritual autobiographies. And throughout his fiction there is a degree of uncertainty about the pervasiveness of material values. It is this uncertainty which makes the term 'realism' both so necessary and yet so difficult in discussions of Defoe. It seems useful in emphasising Crusoe's jeopardy, or Moll's criminality. But it seems unhelpful in understanding the literary status of Crusoe's anguish, or the spiritual meaning of Roxana. By using the term 'realism' in the ensuing discussion, I want to throw light upon several murky areas of the three books in question. It will be seen that the meanings of both 'realism' and 'picaresque' are of interestingly limited use, and that the rather casual assumption of them by many critics has produced a great deal of confusion and very little clarity.

To conclude this chapter, let us remember the problems inherent in the offered definition, however sketchy it may be. I asked how Solzhenitsyn's labour camp could ever be recognisable to one who had never been there. The answer to this lies both in Solzhenitsyn's technique, and, to an extent, in his world-view. The labour camp is recognisable because it is described in the way we would expect a genuine physical location to be described. Had we been there, we would have used the same techniques to report our experiences. Unlike, say, Franz Kafka's Castle, Solzhenitsyn's camp is described without distortion or overpoweringly symbolic emphases. If we begin to see the book as being about more than life in a labour camp, and start to see it as an analysis of the individual's existence under totalitarian government, then we are getting away from seeing it as realistic. If it is taken to be symbolic, then its conventions are allusive and mythic, not descriptive.

It is realistic in the wider sense if we accept Solzhenitsyn's values as being correct and proper. If we, like him, stress liberty and the rights of the individual over the community, then we may be inclined to see his work as ideologically realistic. This would be a return to Greenwood's sense of the term, and would become unhelpful in literary discussion. However, it does serve to show the dangers inherent in all discussion in which the word 'real' appears. Since so many critics have used 'real', 'realism' and 'realistic' in discussion of Defoe, such discussion has become cluttered with unexamined assumptions. We can readily discard the association of 'realistic' with squalor and filth, since that arose from the Naturalist controversy, but it is not so easy to discard the other

ideological overtones of the word. However hard we may try to be descriptive and neutral, the use of 'realistic' is likely to become evaluative. It is in an attempt to avoid that danger that I now go on to explore the realistic conventions of the picaresque novel, and to see how helpful the term 'picaresque' may be in discussing Defoe.



### CHAPTER THREE: THE PICARESQUE NOVEL

We have seen the way in which the attempt to define 'realism' has led to heavy engagement in the murkier areas of philosophy and sociology. The reader may be relieved to hear that 'picaresque' can be much more readily defined. Unlike 'realism', 'picaresque' is a word which functions only in literary discourse, and so there is little confusion of meanings. The main problem in definition is the degree of precision required. The loosest kind of definition is offered by Sir Paul Harvey, who says that 'picaresque' is 'a term applied to a class of romances that deal with rogues and knaves'.<sup>1</sup> Though such definition does tell us something about the term, it is of very little use indeed. We are not told when the term can be applied to this class of romances, and why it should be. Loose definition like this has led to very loose usage of the word, and when a historian talks of 'the evolution of the novel from a surface tale of picaresque adventure, like Robinson Crusoe',<sup>2</sup> we are entitled to ask what the word 'picaresque' can possibly mean here. If the definition is as loose as that offered by Harvey, or assumed by Stone then the term becomes indiscriminative. What kind of adventure is a picaresque adventure? And in what ways are Crusoe's adventures picaresque? Without a more stringent definition such questions are both essential and unanswerable.

Most of the more stringent attempts at definition depend upon the search for some common quality in various works, which can then be isolated and labelled as picaresque. This quality may be some aspect of either the form or the content of a work. Take these two offered definitions as examples:

A work that tells the life story of a knave. It is usually first-personal and episodic. Serving in some menial position, the picaroon through his experiences as a social parasite satirizes the society he has exploited. 3

- 
1. The Oxford Companion to English Literature, ed. Sir Paul Harvey, fourth edition, revised Dorothy Eagle (Oxford, 1967), p. 643.
  2. Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800 (Abridged edition, Penguin ed., Harmondsworth, 1979), p.156.
  3. A Dictionary of World Literary Terms, ed. J.T.Shipley (London, 1955), p. 309. This entry contributed by John Olin Eidson.

Picaresque is a term that must refer to the nature of the subject matter as well as to the superficial autobiographical and episodic features of the fiction. Unfortunately, in English, it is the accidental arrangements that are usually indicated by picaresque. 4

These are meant merely as illustrative examples, but they show clearly the way in which the common feature sought will affect the definition offered. In my discussion of 'realism', I indicated some of the flaws of this type of definition, and with 'picaresque' we see again the danger of moving from a useful descriptive definition to a less helpful prescriptive one.

In lists accompanying these two latter definitions mention is made of The Unfortunate Traveller, Colonel Jack, Captain Singleton, Moll Flanders, Tom Jones, Nicholas Nickleby, The Pirates of Penzance, Lochinvar, Man and Superman and The Horse's Mouth. I think it must be obvious that the enormous diversity in style, theme and structure within this list shows the need for an attempt at defining 'picaresque' in a precise way.<sup>5</sup>

In practical terms, serious critical investigation has been hampered by the absence of such a definition. For example, recent discussions of Smollett's fiction have illustrated just how unsatisfactory the dictionary definitions can be. In a book published in 1964, Donald Bruce prefixes his discussion of Smollett by describing 'the Picaresque novel, a Spanish form although ultimately from late Latin fiction... the biography of a wandering rogue-hero, who is an occasional criminal but most of the time a none-too-honest manservant. Usually like Roderick Random he serves a succession of masters. The form was necessarily a loose and episodic one, and since it depended a great deal on the author's observation of life, it always contained opportunities for social criticism.'<sup>6</sup> The imprecision of Bruce's definition raises many more problems than it solves. We are not told anything at all about the 'late Latin fiction' to which the picaresque novel owes its ultimate parentage, nor are we told

---

4. A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms, ed. Roger Fowler (London, 1955) p. 309. This entry contributed by John Olin Eidson.

5. This confusion is explored in Harry Sieber, The Picaresque (London, 1977), pp. 1-5.

6. Donald Bruce, Radical Doctor Smollett (London, 1964), p. 165.

anything about the evolutionary process between them. And can we agree, without argument, that the picaresque novel is always comic? Why is it called a biography when all the (unnamed) Spanish examples are presented, albeit fraudently, as autobiography? Is the form necessarily loose and episodic? Were these opportunities for social criticism taken up, or were they largely ignored? To which novels is the writer referring? Perhaps I am making rather too much of an unfortunately loose piece of critical writing, but I think that Bruce's fumbings are symptomatic of the rather imprecise and clumsy way recent critics have approached the definition of the picaresque novel.

Another recent writer has used the picaresque novel as a way of approaching Smollett. Again he is convinced that 'picaresque' can cover one observable aspect of otherwise dissimilar works, for he claims that Lazarillo de Tormes, Gil Blas, Colonel Jack, Roderick Random and The Pickwick Papers all 'obviously belong to the same kind'.<sup>7</sup> In a very striking passage, he identifies the common feature of all these works as being 'the struggle of an individual against hostile society'.<sup>8</sup> The picaresque novel differs from other rogue literature only by having this theme, and though the 'biting satiric spirit' of Lucian, Apuleius and Petronius pervades later works, only the picaresque deals with essentially social themes. This attempt at definition is clearly more precise than Bruce's, but it still presents great problems. By ignoring the formal features of these picaresque novels, Giddings makes theme the sole defining feature. Unfortunately, he does not clarify whether this theme is an accidental similarity or an essential definitive property. If the first, then we have a handy rule of thumb by which we can provisionally detect the presence of a picaresque fiction. However, he still has not told us what picaresque means. If the second, he has told us what it means, but in doing so he has cast his net rather widely. If this theme of the individual struggling against society is what makes works picaresque, then we have to include the following: Hamlet, Prometheus Unbound, Oliver Twist, and all the works of Zola. Again, surely a definition which has as little discriminative power as this can be of very limited critical use.

In essential agreement with Giddings's approach is G.S. Rousseau, who claims that 'nothing has confused the Smollettian picture more than the

---

7. Robert Giddings, The Tradition of Smollett (London, 1967), p.25.

8. Giddings, ibid.

erroneous belief that "picaresque" is a term describing the form of a prose work.<sup>9</sup> Instead, the term applies to 'the material or content aspect of a literary work'. When Rousseau gives a positive account of his definition, he lists the observable qualities which authenticate a work as picaresque:

Let us define picaresque content as applicable to those works which, regardless of their form - and this last clause is all important - contain a first person narrator, a picaro, whose social fluidity is marked, whose perspective towards himself and the external world is demonstrably oblique, and who haphazardly wanders through a natural or mental landscape only to discover that his life is a game from which he ought to and finally does withdraw. (ibid, p.1889)

Though this is more extensive and discriminatory than any definition offered so far, it is not without its difficulties. Is Rousseau entitled to include the picaro as a necessary quality for the picaresque novel, without definition? There is a danger of circularity in his argument if he does. Also, it is odd that Rousseau makes no mention of the hero's squalid origins or his poverty. And what does 'mental landscape' refer to? Does 'haphazardly' accurately reflect the workings of necessity and compulsion (e.g.hunger) in the picaresque novel? Is the life of the picaro merely a game? We may raise these questions for the moment, and they will re-appear in the attempt at definition later on.

From what we have seen so far, there seem to be three different ways of approaching the picaresque novel, typified by Bruce, Giddings and Rousseau respectively. The first is to indicate, non-historically, a number of conventions that any work must display if it is properly to be called picaresque. In the case of Bruce's definition, the relevant conventions are the comic biographical form, and the loose and episodic structure. The trouble with a definition as loose as this is that it loses more in discriminative power than it gains by its catholicity.

---

9. G.S. Rousseau, 'Smollett and the Picaresque: Some Questions About a Label', Studies in Burke and His Time, XII (1970-71), 1886-1905. A reply to this article, raising some of the qualifications I indicate is Paul-Gabriel Boucé, 'Smollett's Pseudo-picaresque: A Response to Rousseau's Smollett and the Picaresque', Studies in Burke and His Time, XIV (1972-3), 73-81.



The canon of picaresque novels generated by such a form of definition cannot readily be distinguished from similar but essentially different literary forms. For instance, in the later eighteenth-century, comic biography was very popular. Here is the complaint of a writer in the Critical Review for December 1781:

This mode of making up a book and styling it the Adventures of a Cat, a Dog, a Monkey, a Hackney-Coach, a Louse, a Shilling, a Rupee, or - anything else, is grown so fashionable, that few months pass which do not bring one of them under our inspection. It is indeed a convenient method to writers of the inferior class, of emptying their common-place books, and throwing together all the farrago of public transactions, private characters, old and new stories, everything, in short, which they can pick up, to afford a little temporary amusement to an idle reader. 10.

If we restrict ourselves to Bruce's definition, we would have to call every one of these novels picaresque. By ignoring the theme and content of the novels (or rather, by blithely saying that they must be comic), Bruce loses the power to discriminate between jolly autobiography and more serious picaresque. Also, the non-historical criterion means he is unable to talk of the development of the picaresque, or any kinds of change in its use. Nor can he really talk of forms similar to the picaresque novel. In fact, his attempt at definition generates so many examples that it becomes a vacuous piece of critical apparatus. When he says that Smollett's novels, or anyone else's are picaresque, he is merely aligning them to an enormous number of other novels, and greatly varied works at that. Without more discriminative force than this, the offered definition is very unhelpful, and can be considered as redundant.

The second way of defining the picaresque novel is to illustrate a tradition of fiction and to trace the development of significant conventions within this tradition. As Giddings says, it is possible to define a number of common features observable in different novels in different historical periods. This is not to deny that there

- 
10. Quoted by J.M.S. Tompkins, The Popular Novel in England, 1770-1800 (London, 1937), p.49. The novel under discussion in the Critical Review is 'Helenus Scott, M.D.', The Adventures of a Rupee. Further examples of this kind of fiction are given by Tompkins, pp. 45-52.



are significant differences between these novels, but is to claim that these differences are due to development and experimentation. For this claim to be profitable, and for it to generate a useful concept of the picaresque, Giddings has to show that the resemblances between these novels outweigh the differences, and I am not convinced that he achieves this. Giddings claims that the common feature is the recurrent theme of the struggle of an individual within a hostile society. As I said, this would make Hamlet picaresque, or even King Lear, and yet the differences between Hamlet and Roderick Random are far greater than any similarities. Hence, there is little profit in adopting Giddings's view of the recurrent defining feature.

However, his is not the only attempt to define in this way, and his is not the only theme to be isolated. Stuart Miller sees the common feature as the chaotic sense of life - 'It is the unique resource of the picaresque novel to vividly explore [sic] and lament the hopeless whirl of Fortune in which we are all involved'.<sup>11</sup> A.A.Parker talks of 'the atmosphere of delinquency' as 'the distinguishing features of the genre'.<sup>12</sup> Robert Alter describes the picaresque novel as 'a permanent addition to the storehouse of literary devices'.<sup>13</sup> Each of these critics is trying to find one particular quality by which any given novel can be identified as picaresque, and yet this must also be a quality which will also allow recognition of the differences between various picaresque novels. The quality sought is still left rather vague. Miller talks of the theme of chaos, and an attitude towards that theme (lamentation). Parker talks only of an 'atmosphere', without fully clarifying the properties of such an atmosphere in specifically picaresque novels as opposed to, say, detective novels. Alter sees definition as lying in a specific technique, rather than in some theme. Yet each of these attempts at least allows a more coherent critical discussion than that offered by Bruce. Miller and Parker are both lucid on the differences between Guzmán de Alfarache and Gil Blas, while still seeing them as advancing a similar theme. The best example of this synoptic approach is R.W.B.Lewis's The Picaresque Saint (London, 1960), which sees the pícaro as a representative figure

---

11. Stuart Miller, The Picaresque Novel (Cleveland, 1967), p. 29.

12. A.A.Parker, Literature and the Delinquent: The Picaresque Novel in Spain and Europe 1599-1753 (Edinburgh, 1967), p.6.

13. Robert Alter, Rogue's Progress: Studies in the Picaresque Novel (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), p. ix.

in modern fiction - 'a person who is something of a saint, in the contemporary manner of sainthood, but who is also something of a rogue' (p.10)

Such a view is clearly of greater critical use than the looseness of Bruce's attempt. However, it still presents difficulties. For example, there is a great question, left largely unasked, as to whether the genre covered by the definition is the product of conscious literary endeavour, or merely the retrospective critical recognition of similarity. To clarify this distinction, take examples of the former the carefully defined genres of epic, tragedy, mock-heroic, pastoral and so on. For the latter, think more of George Lukács' analysis of the nineteenth-century historical novel, or any of the many recent examples of numerological criticism.<sup>14</sup> That is to say, when we delimit the class of picaresque novels, are we simply defining an already existent literary category? Or are we creating a new class through the non-contemporary recognition of patterns and recurrences? Some writers clearly do see the picaresque as a genre, even if the word itself is not used. Smollett, for example, has this kind of existent tradition in mind when he reminds his reader of Le Sage:

The same method has been practised by other Spanish and French authors, and by none more successfully than by Monsieur Le Sage, who in his Adventures of Gil Blas, has described the knavery and foibles of life, with infinite humour and sagacity. - The following sheets I have modelled on his plan, taking the liberty, however, to differ from him in the execution, where I thought his particular situations were uncommon, extravagant, or peculiar to the country in which the scene is laid. 15.

Smollett is assuring the reader of the probity of the book by claiming a respectable ancestry and precedent tradition, much as Fielding claims generic integrity in his Preface to Joseph Andrews. Yet there are many writers whom we may wish to call picaresque who make no such claim, and Defoe is one of them.

When 'picaresque' is used as a generic form in this way, it seems to

---

14. See, for instance, D. Brooks, Number and Pattern in the Eighteenth Century Novel, (London and Boston, 1973). The Lukács text referred to is his The Historical Novel (London, 1962).

15. Tobias Smollett, The Adventures of Roderick Random, ed. Boucé, p. xliv.

depend on the view that literature does develop and does have a recognisable tradition, which can be isolated. It is as though the picaresque novel developed (normally meaning 'improved') from fledgling Spanish efforts, through to the peaks of achievement in Guzmán and Simplicissimus, finally falling off gently with only very occasional small triumphs.<sup>16</sup> The danger then is that a critically-neutral term like 'picaresque', which only indicates the presence of the distinguishing feature, will become evaluative. Novels which are thus only partially picaresque will be seen as failed attempts to be wholly picaresque.<sup>17</sup> For example, Stuart Miller starts by saying that the distinguishing feature of the picaresque novel is its portrayal of the chaotic view of life. On its own, this does not mean that a novel which adopts such a view is in any way worthwhile, yet when discussing Moll Flanders Miller begins to talk of 'Defoe's most brilliant stroke' being his variant on this particular theme. Miller further credits Defoe with a development of the novelistic techniques available to the picaresque writer - '...Defoe profoundly enriched the technique of the picaresque novel for projecting its central truth: chaos is universal' (p. 53). The significant point here is the way a development of technical resource is seen as a triumph. The picaresque novel is implicitly thought to be evolving from a primitive to a sophisticated form. Yet how much of this can genuinely be credited to Defoe? His alleged achievement is only an advance once we are aware of Miller's definition of the picaresque novel, and this definition is most unlikely to have been prevalent in the early eighteenth century. Miller's assumption that the recurrence of the 'chaos is everywhere' theme is a sign of increasing literary sophistication requires much more support than he gives it. Importantly, without this support, much of what he says about Defoe is rendered less valuable.

The idea of a thematic tradition is thus open to objections, and obviously ignores the more formal features of the novels. Both Miller and Parker start from the assumption that there are novels properly called picaresque and try to trace development in the presentation of the recurrent theme within them. Miller does, it is true, pay attention to

---

16. This view is expressed in Alter's Rogue's Progress. His case is not helped by his treating everything before Gil Blas in rather less than 4,000 words, and by failing to mention either Quevedo or Alemán.

17. This slide occurs in The Picaresque Saint and <sup>is</sup> discussed by Booth, Rhetoric of Fiction, pp. 31-33. The process is identical with that I treated in Chapter Two with 'realism'.

the rhetorical features of the novels, but he does so solely by seeing them as variant ways of presenting this theme. Though theme and form cannot, of course, be wholly separated, it is surely a mistake to examine one solely in terms of the other. It is quite possible that a genre can produce formal conventions which are not generated by any recurrent theme within that genre. For example, the stage conventions of Elizabethan comedy and tragedy are obviously shared, but the themes in each genre are distinct. To name only one such convention, disguise has power in both the comedies and the tragedies, but though used to different ends, remains the same convention. Consequently, any such convention cannot be seen simply as a means to advance only the one theme. From now on I will try to define the picaresque novel in terms of its formal and thematic features. In doing so, I share the approach of G.S. Rousseau, who was attacked earlier. Though Rousseau's conclusions are not satisfactory, his method is the best one available. Rousseau defines the term 'picaresque' by the content of a restricted set of novels, not as a 'form' of fiction (where 'form' refers to a kind, not to shape or structure). However, he does not confine himself to purely thematic features; he includes within his definition the first person narrator and other material aspects of a work. This eclectic approach is the third kind of definition. Rousseau specifies both thematic, and, in the broadest sense, formal conventions. The picaresque novel, he says, exhibits a belief in the instability of experience by means of the hectic social movements of the picaro. Though we may have reservations about this, it does allow us to ask the most pertinent questions about Defoe. Now that we can ask whether Defoe is realistic~~x~~ in presentation, it will be useful to ask if he is picaresque. By carefully defining 'picaresque' in the same ostensive way as 'realistic' it should be possible to translate the broad question - 'Are Defoe's novels picaresque?' - into a series of smaller, more manageable questions. The nature of these questions will become apparent once the qualities of picaresque fiction have been specified. In order to specify these qualities, we must now examine the ostensible features of three novels - Lazarillo de Tormes, Guzmán de Alfarache, and El Buscón. These are incontestably picaresque novels, if the term is to have any meaning at all, and by enumerating their features, we should be in a position to offer a tentative definition of the picaresque novel.

The first of the novels to be called 'picaresque' is the anonymous Lazarillo de Tormes, first published in 1554. Some critics have



reservations about calling Lazarillo an example of the picaresque proper, preferring to think of it as a close antecedent or precursor. For example, A.A. Parker says:

Although Lazarillo de Tormes should be kept historically and thematically distinct from the picaresque genre proper, it must be given its due as the precursor. 18.

Parker's reasons for this partial exclusion are dependent on his definition of the picaresque in terms of extended treatments of delinquency, and if we do not share his definition, we are not obliged to share his reservations. There is a Spanish precedent for the realistic treatment of low-life, Ferdinand de Rojas' Celestina,<sup>(c.1499)</sup> but that work has few, if any, of the picaresque characteristics. Celestina is an oddly mixed work, combining comedy and tragedy rather crudely. Lazarillo, on the other hand, makes no pretensions to gravity or solemnity, and its single-minded approach to entertainment is stated in the prologue:

In this childish little story I confess that I'm no better than my neighbour and it doesn't worry me that anybody can read my story and enjoy it, if they do, even if it is written in a crude way. I think it's a good thing for them to know that there's a man alive who has soon so much disaster, danger and bad luck. 19.

Notice here the use of realistic technique as defined in the previous chapter. The book is presented in a non-fictional way (as autobiography) and in a conversational register. The narrator is Lazarillo himself, a low-born character whose name is taken not from his father, but from the river he was born beside. His background too is presented realistically, with especial stress laid on recognisable human motives of fear, hunger and greed. The hero's identity is established very early on, and he is presented immediately in the context of illegality:

Now when I was about eight years old they caught my father bleeding the sacks belonging to the people who came to have their crops milled there. So they arrested him, and he confessed, denied nothing, and was punished by law. (p.25)

---

18. Parker, Literature and the Delinquent, p.28.

19. Lazarillo de Tormes, translated by Michael Alpert, in Two Spanish Picaresque Novels (Harmondsworth, 1969), pp. 23-24. Further references to Lazarillo will be to this edition, and will be incorporated within the text.



71

The portrayal here relies on the inversion of the romance. The hero of romance is traditionally exalted, high-born and virtuous. Lazarillo is the product of the unblessed union of a criminal and a whore. He never has anything that could be called a home. Like the river Tormes, he is destined to wander, and in the picaresque novel, this wandering takes the form of servitude to a succession of masters.

In the romance, the hero sets off to do battle with the corruption of the world, in order to purify his own quest; in the picaresque novel, the central character (I feel uneasy about calling him the hero, with that word's overtone of admiration and approval) sets out in the world in order to escape from starvation and abuse in the place of his birth (again, I feel reluctant to refer to that as a home, with that word's connotations of comfort and domesticity). Lazarillo's first master is a blind man, and it is through him that Lazarillo begins to learn about the true nature of the world:

I went back to my master who was impatiently waiting for me. We left Salamanca and came to the bridge. As you get to it there is a stone animal there which looks like a bull. The blind man told me to go up to it and then he said:

'Lazaro, put your ear close to the bull and you'll hear a loud noise inside it.'

I was so simple that I did just that, and when he felt that my head was against the stone, he straightened his arm and gave me such a blow that my head crashed against that blasted bull so hard that it hurt me for three days or more. (p.27)

This action by the blind man is not gratuitously vindictive. He is attempting to educate Lazarillo in the harsh ways of the world - 'You'll have to learn that a blind man's boy has got to be sharper than a needle' (p.27). Lazarillo has forcibly to learn the arts of survival, and the reader goes through a similar process, having his notions of romantic honour and justice corrected. In these early days, the narrator is gullible enough to be abused by a weak blind man, and, let it be noted, he is thus being introduced to a world where blind men are not objects of pity, but easy targets for rogues.

The narrator comes quickly to see that the only way to survive in this very hostile environment is to become skilful in the arts of cunning and deception. Soon, he is able to trick his master, and is

forced into doing so, because, as he tells us, 'if I hadn't used all my cunning and the tricks I knew, I would have died of hunger more than once' (p.29). Eventually, Lazarillo leaves his master badly hurt, and seems unconcerned about his fate - 'I never found out what happened to him and I did not bother to inquire either' (p.37). As the book progresses, we see Lazarillo serve a succession of such cruel masters, and our expectations of them become inverted. For instance, the priest whom Lazarillo serves is not a pious, kind or humble man, as we might expect, but another character whose concern is solely with securing his own survival:

After I'd been with him for three weeks I was so weak that I couldn't stand on my own two feet out of sheer hunger. I saw quite clearly that unless God and my common sense helped me, the next step would be the grave. (p.39)

Lazarillo's invocation of God here is very hollow, for the book deals wholly with a cruel, materialistic universe. The narrator cannot trust to a benevolent providence, but must rather rely entirely on his wits and native cunning. As he says, 'necessity's a good teacher' (p.44), and what it teaches is guile. As the book trundles amiably along, Lazarillo is consistently mistreated by his masters, though we may learn little about them.<sup>20</sup> The narrator tells us more about himself than about anyone else, and we serve as privileged onlookers at his progress from naive gullibility to successful competitive craftiness.

The characters Lazarillo encounters are uniformly corrupt, and each represents some part of contemporary Spanish society. Thus, the book becomes directly related to this contemporary society and satirises it as much as the book satirises the conventional romance. Only once does the narrator meet a decent master, and this occasion once again reminds us of the harshness and bleakness of the book's outlook:

After I left the priest I went to work for a constable as it seemed a good idea to get in with the law. But I didn't stay long with him because my job was dangerous. In particular, one night my master and I were chased by some fugitives who threw stones at us and set about us with sticks. They didn't catch me but they gave

---

20. See, for example, Chapter Four, in which all we learn about the 'friar of the Order of Mercy' is that Lazarillo left him because of his worldliness 'and also because of one or two other things that I'd rather not mention' (p.66). The social satire here is made more explicit by being so understated.

my master a proper working-over  
That decided me to break my contract. (p.77)

It becomes obvious that in a book where blind men are sadistic villains and priests are cruel worldly misers, a policeman's lot cannot be a happy one. Though Lazarillo is clearly not equipped with the necessary scruple and conscience to act as an enforcer of the law, he does have sufficient intelligence to recognise that cosy corruption is more comfortable than outright criminality. In short, he decides to fall in with the prevailing hypocrisy - 'I realised that you can't get on unless you are in a government job' (p.77). Having developed, out of harsh necessity, from a gullible youth to a mature and successful schemer, Lazarillo is now socially acceptable. His talents in guile and mendacity do not qualify him for the career of the committed outlaw, but for a post in the equivalent of the civil service.

Thus, the anonymous author has used his central narrator to explore the life of viciousness and cruelty. However, the book's main interest, as well as its central irony, is that this viciousness is not the exclusive property of a criminal underworld; it is the revealed basis of all the supposedly respectable social institutions. The theme of the book is the banishment of idealistic illusions, and the consequent revelation of hypocrisy. We are shown surprising and indeed rather shocking facts about the world. Social advancement is not to be achieved by intrinsic merit or virtue or talent, but by scheming and avarice and cunning. Neither Lazarillo nor the book as a whole adopts a coherent or consistent moral attitude to these facts. Lazarillo rather knowingly accepts them as the facts of life, and no critical perspective is introduced by the author. Nor does any other character gain sufficient importance to impress any other view upon us. We, just like Lazarillo, care little about the fate of the blind man once he leaves the book, and our response to the book becomes like Lazarillo's response to his life - it is a series of events, some amusing, some revolting, which we must learn to embrace and survive. It should be stressed that the book does not invite us to see these events in terms of an early definition of picaro: 'low, vicious, deceitful, dishonourable and shameless'.<sup>21</sup> At no time in Lazarillo de Tormes does this tone of moral disgust become apparent. Rather the characters accept what happens to them, without rancour or spite, and we as readers respond likewise.

---

21. The definition comes from the Dictionary of the Spanish Academy in 1726, and is quoted by Parker, Literature and the Delinquent, p.4.

In the next novel to be considered as picaresque, moral severity is invited at the beginning. In Mateo Alemán's Guzmán de Alfarache, first published in 1599, the narrator opens the account of his life with a grave warning:

...considering with myselfe, that  
there is not any Booke so bad, out  
of which some good may not be drawne,  
it may be possible, that in that wherein  
my wit was wanting, the zeale which I  
had to profit others, may supply that  
defect. 22

In Spain at least, the ostensibly didactic tone proved very popular. This can be seen by the fact that within six years of its publication, the book was in a thirtieth edition. Whereas Lazarillo unrepentantly recounts his deeds for the amusement of a knowing and sharing audience, Guzmán reflects on his earlier life from a position of penitence, with the apparent intention of warning us against roguery. As the prefatory poem to the second part says:

Poore Guzman's life, the mapp of Vice and Sinne,  
Story'ed by Aleman, is as a Voyce  
From Heav'n, shewing how thou shouldst make thy choise.  
(III, 14)

Indeed, in this second part, the book's difference from Lazarillo de Tormes becomes very obvious. The narrator offers his history as a warning, not as a diversion:

For my punishments and my misfortunes,  
if thou wilt truly informe thy selfe  
of them, will serve thee in stead of a  
Looking-glasse, whereby thou may'st see  
how to linke a little better together  
the past, and the present, with that  
which is to come in the Third Part; to  
the end, that thou making it all one  
continued piece of worke, weaving it  
well and handsomely, running along in  
even threads, thou maist the better  
(which is no more than becomes thee)  
be instructed in the truth of things. (III, 38)

Not only is this didactic stance very different from the randomness of Lazarillo, it also seems to contradict the definition of picaresque which depends on the chaotic sense of life. Guzmán here seems to be saying

22. The Rogue: Or The Life of Guzmán de Alfarache, translated by James Mabbe (1622, under the name of 'Don Diego Puede-Ser'), ed. James Fitzmaurice-Kelly, four volumes (London and New York, 1924), I, 16. Further references will be to this edition and will be incorporated into the text. Mabbe's translation is occasionally inaccurate, but these inaccuracies are not germane to my treatment of Alemán. See the analogous difficulties with another Mabbe translation discussed by Helen Phipps Houck, 'Mabbe's Paganization of the Celestina', PMLA, LIV (1939), 422-431.



that life is not chaotic, though it may appear to be so. In fact, there is some kind of moral patterning, which the form of his own life reveals. The moral patterning is revealed by the fate of Guzmán - he ends as a galley-slave - and by his self-recrimination throughout. If we remember how 'shameless' Lazarillo was, we may well be surprised when Guzmán says, '...if I myselve had not been ashamed, I should not have wasted so many sheetes as this volume containes, to acquaint thee with the sad Story of my miserable Life' (I, 238).

Though the recriminative stance is new, Guzmán's early life is similar to Lazarillo's. It is made to seem full of jeopardy, and to be haphazard, and though it is repeatedly emphasised that Guzman is not of a criminal disposition, he is driven towards knavery by the lack of alternative means of securing survival. Again, as with Lazarillo, the basic necessity for food becomes prominent, and Guzmán is forced to take armed struggle against hunger:

Seeing myselve in this desperate  
State, counting my selfe, as it were,  
a lost man, I began to follow the  
Trade de la Florida Picardia, exercising  
all your Cony-catching trickes, knavish  
prankes, fine feates, with slight of  
hand, and whatsoever Rogueries come  
within the compasse of that prowling  
office. (I, 251)

There is a certain moral ambiguity in Guzmán's moral position. He is not repenting of his fall into knavery - that, we are assured with tediously convincing <sup>frequency</sup> /is unavoidable. He feels he cannot be blamed for becoming a rogue, but seems to think there is something wrong and blameworthy about becoming a skilful rogue. His sin is thus not theft or deception, but the enjoyment of, and success at, theft and deception. His haphazard early life is not simply a rhetorical device introduced to leave Guzmán free to wander, it is the first indication of the theme of inconstancy and unpredictability. At an important point in the narrative, just before being wrongfully arrested as a thief, Guzmán takes occasion to lament the transience of life:

...the Ayre doth not ascend with that  
nimbleness and quicke motion to the  
top of the highest Mountaines, as  
Fortune doth elevate and lifē men up  
by ways and meanes, neither seene,  
nor thought upon, never suffering them  
to continue still firme, either in  
the one or t'other estate; to the end  
that he is dejected, may not despaire;  
and he that is exalted, may not presume.  
(I, 146)



The viewpoint to which we are directed is that the world offers not attainable stability or security. The picaro, both Lazarillo and Guzmán, faces life without any of the advantages which may serve to cushion the harmful effects of Fortune's working - for example, wealth, family, education, social respectability etc. All he has to call upon for his protection is his innate cunning. Lazarillo saw life purely in these combative terms: it was a contest, where the essential supplies of food and wealth were limited, and where only the most adept rogue could secure a sufficiency to ensure survival. For Lazarillo too, this immediacy was the only important feature of life - the demands of the moment necessarily overrode any qualms about religion or morality.

At the beginning of Guzmán de Alfarache, the narrator seems to share this single-mindedness, but he changes as the book progresses. and eventually comes to see a pattern behind his experience:

... I spent a great part of the night, showing downe teares in abundance, and waxing now heavy with grieffe for my sinnes, I fell asleepe; and when I awoke, I found my selfe another manner of man then I was before...God runnes a contrary course with his friends, with those that are his elected, and best beloved children; the cherishments, and blandishments, that he bestows upon them, are poverty, afflictions and persecutions. (IV, 329-331)

This is in fact the third opportunity Guzman has been offered to repent of his evil ways. The earlier two were rejected, or failed, and even this more explicit statement of belief is not without its ambiguities. Guzmán's acceptance of religion is, like his earlier rejection of it, in his own interest. It involves an act of betrayal of his companions in the galleys, and puts him in favour with the authorities.<sup>23</sup> However, though we may have reservations about Guzmán as a genuinely convincing penitent, and though we may also have reservations about Alemán's control over his material at this point, we should notice this repentance is expressed. Guzmán talks first of all about life as chaos or chance, then begins to detect within this apparent randomness a dominant controlling hand of providence. The image of providence as a pattern emerging from what seems to be haphazard is one which figures in much of Defoe, and

23. This point is made by Christine J. Whitbourn, 'Moral Ambiguity in the Spanish Picaresque Tradition', and by J.A. Jones, 'The Duality and Complexity of Guzmán de Alfarache: Some Thoughts on the Structure and interpretation of Alemán's Novel', both collected in Knaves and Swindlers: Essays on the Picaresque Novel in Europe, ed. C. J. Whitbourn (London New York and Toronto, 1974), pp. 1-48. See also Parker, op.cit., pp. 36-45.

one to which we shall certainly return.

Before we leave Guzmán de Alfarache, we should note that its serious tone (even if this is a tone which is sometimes poorly handled) militates against any definition of the picaresque as essentially comic. Indeed, the book is so long and complex, muddled even, that Hazlitt, amongst others, has denied it the title of novel. Hazlitt says 'it can hardly be ranked as a novel or work of the imagination', for the reason that it is 'didactic rather than dramatic'.<sup>24</sup> We may doubt Hazlitt's distinction here between works of imagination and didacticism, but he is certainly accurate in spotting the lack of dramatic pungency in Alemán's work. Compared with the wit and vivacity of Lazarillo de Tormes, it seems flaccid and ambulatory. Alemán even makes use of the romance devices of the interpolated tale and the extended digression, causing us to lose sight of the central character for long periods of time. The book is also enormously long and widely discursive. What we may call the double structure (the narrative of Guzmán as pícaro presented alongside the reflections and lamentations of Guzmán as penitent) does present problems of rhetoric. The juxtaposition of the two opposed views of life is not often handled well, and neither view achieves full expression. The twin aims of racy amusement and pious edification are rarely achieved simultaneously.

To see further the range of the picaresque novel in Spain, as a preliminary to definition, let us look at Francisco de Quevedo's El Buscón, published in 1626. Here a less austere combination of levity and seriousness is sought:

Here you will find all the tricks  
of the low life or those which I think  
most people enjoy reading about:  
craftiness, deceit, subterfuge and  
swindles, born of laziness to enable  
you to live on lies; and if you attend  
to the lesson, you will get quite a  
lot of benefit from it. 25

Quevedo does not assume that the delinquent life is entirely new to his readers; he knows they enjoy reading about crooks. Yet he hopes, and we have no reason to doubt his sincerity, that his readers will be edified by a reading of El Buscón. His twin aims of edification and amusement are more tentative than are Alemán's, being more in the spirit of, say, the cony-catching pamphlets of Greene and Dekker, or Jonson's comedies -

24. William Hazlitt, Lectures on the English Comic Writers, in his Complete Works, ed. P.P.Howe (21 vols., London and Toronto, 1930-34), VI, 111.

25. The Swindler, translated by Michael Alpert, op.cit., p. 83. This is the only translation to include the Address to the Reader. Later references will be to the translation by John Stevens, as 'The Life of Paul, the Spanish Sharper', in The Comical Works of Don Francisco de Quevedo, trans. of the Visions (London, 1707), pp. 154-347.

the reader will be edified by learning the tricks of rogues, while he enjoys reading about these tricks, and this will assist him to avoid being gulled himself. Again the narration is carried on by the central character, in the guise of autobiography. Paul, or Pablos (the name is rendered differently in different translations), is an accomplished rogue, and he knows his readers would act as he does, if under similar provocation. He hopes that his book might help them to become more efficient crooks, if crooks they must be, and his only regret is that his own skill has failed to improve radically his own lot in life.

As in the case of Lazarillo and Guzmán, Paul comes from very squalid surroundings. His father is a criminal and his mother is a bawd. Very rapidly he learns the way of life most suited to those in positions as poor as his own - 'there is no living in this world without stealing' (p.157). He is, as much as the earlier narrators, deprived of his innocence by cruelty and harsh treatment. Once he realises that he is surrounded by delinquents and competitors, he decides to become as adept in criminality as they are:

When you are at Rome, do as they do at Rome, says the Proverb, and it is well said. I took it so seriously into consideration, that I fully resolv'd to play the Knave among Knaves, and to outdo them all if possible. (p.196)

Paul's tricks and larcencies are not the immediately necessary acts of a starving man, required to avoid starvation or dire poverty. Lazarillo steals in order to eat. - the alternative is death. Guzmán steals wilfully - but comes to regret this greatly. Paul, however, adopts the delinquent life out of prudence - the life of a thief is more congenial than the life of a pauper. He adopts knavery as the most likely means of attaining security and comfort, amongst a number of alternatives. Consequently, El Buscón becomes less a personalised battle of wits between master and servant, and more of a competitive onslaught on the social factors which retard Paul's progress.

In Paul's search for security, he comes across a series of 'fools', each of whom is entirely self-obsessed. The most sympathetic character is, surprisingly, the thread-bare beggar. In the episode of the 'college' of thread-bare gentlemen, we see a subterfuge being adopted by the deceivers, with the sole aim of preserving a feeble standard of living. The other characters, such as the hangman, the strategist, the poet, the solicitor and the hermit, are all unaware of the grotesque facts of poverty, being

blinded by their own pursuits after vanities. By joining the threadbare company, Paul fully accepts his status as a delinquent, and his pretences are self-conscious. He does not, as do the others, erect a spurious system of order (chivalry, rhetoric or strategy) to conceal the arbitrariness of fortune. His only certainties are seen in the taunts he uses as insults - 'By the Lord, quoth I, the rogue that said that is a Jew, a Sodomite and a Cuckold' (p. 290). By using these as terms of abuse, Paul recognises stability only in his race, his sexual identity and his wife's fidelity. Only these are the bulwarks of his values. It is significant that he avoids mention of parentage or social standing, since he is in no position to taunt others about such things.

Since he does not assume the world to be stable, Paul is forewarned and forearmed against its unpredictability. He feels free to be unpredictable himself, and to change his appearance and his habits, if by so doing he can consolidate or even improve his station. His identity is changed at will - '...having been informed by my Friends that changing of Names was not expensive, and might prove very advantageous' (pp. 293-44). His own lack of fixity reflects a different kind of literary enterprise than that seen in Lazarillo and Guzmán. Lazarillo's character, in spite of his narration, was only available to us through his actions. At no time did his reflections impede the dramatic current of events. In Guzmán, there was an unsatisfactory split between Guzmán the agent and Guzmán the sermoniser. Quevedo's narrator does allow us access to his reflections, but these are as open to fluctuation as his actions. That is to say, in El Buscón the narrator's reflections become an integral part of the narrative flow; they do not introduce some external moral perspective. When Paul makes a pronouncement, we are always reminded of the immediate situation, not of external verities. For instance, when he is robbed by his companions, he says, 'A curse on him that puts his Trust in ill gotten Wealth, which goes as it comes' (p. 31). The moral pronouncement, equally, goes as it comes. Paul does not pretend to penitence, and his symptoms are the symptoms of regret, not of remorse.

At the end of Lazarillo, the narrator had achieved as much comfort and stability as he was ever likely to in his unstable world. At the end of Guzmán, the narrator had come to detect a patterning of events, and had come to see the world as stable and orderly. At the end of El Buscón, no such stability is achieved. As Paul sets off for a new life elsewhere, he knows that this is simply another turn in his career, not a culmination or a final turn:



26

...and therefore with the Advice of my Doxy Grajales, I resolved to go to the West-Indies, taking her along with me to try whether I could meet with better Fortune in another Country, but it prov'd worse; for they never mend their Condition, who only change places without mending their life and Manners. (pp.346-7)

Paul's regret at not finding any kind of security is restrained and understated in contrast to the 'other characters' exuberant confidence on their respective discoveries. However, Paul's experience seems the most authentic, when compared with the facile cynicism of Lazarillo or the equally facile piety of Guzmán. Paul has travelled, and moved through various social groups, and has come to see that he can expect little from life. By means of his contact with others, we learn that the expectation of orderly experience is as much of a sham as the thread-bare gentleman's social respectability. It seems as though normal society is incompetent to cope with the vagaries of fortune and that the only form of organisation which can cope and thrive is institutionalised delinquency. The fact that the criminals can use the received social code to their advantage - feeding off the courtesy of others - shows normal society to be at best a clumsy mechanism for securing comfort and stability. Paul expresses the belief that improvement would be attainable if only people set about 'mending their life and manners'. The reader has no grounds whatsoever for such confidence.

On the basis of an examination of only these three novels, are we in a position to attempt a definition of the picaresque? The limitations imposed upon the enquiry may be constricting, but they may help to find a definition which is both restricted and restricting. The formal features apparent in these three novels could equally be found in many others, and to that extent the choice of novels is arbitrary.<sup>26</sup> However, if picaresque is to be discriminating as a critical term, then we must offer it the same kind of ostensive definition as we gave 'realism'. If these three novels are not picaresque, then the word has little meaning. I am not here trying to give an account of the historical genesis of the term 'picaresque' but am trying to evolve a meaning which will show some usages to be correct and some to be incorrect. As we shall see in discussion of the theme of the picaresque, the term has been used

---

26. Reference could, of course, be made to other Spanish works, such as Marcos de Obregon, (1618), La Picara Justina, (1604), Estebanillo Gonzales, (1646), or Rinconete and Cortadillo, (1613).



both confusedly and as an accurate description of confusion. Only a definition which is based on a limited number of texts will be able to show the difference between these.

The first step in this definition is to say that picaresque fiction is a Spanish phenomenon, appearing throughout what is normally called the 'Golden Age' of Spanish literature.<sup>27</sup> Three novels may be taken as paradigms of the type, Lazarillo de Tormes, Guzmán de Alfarache, and El Buscón. The characteristics of these works will be the characteristics of the picaresque novel. No work may differ greatly from these characteristics and be properly called picaresque. The characteristics of these novels are as follows:

- (a) pseudo-autobiography. Each of these novels is narrated in the first person, by the central character, using the colloquial language of the social group involved in the incidents narrated.
- (b) the picaro as central character. The narrator's personality is described by the title of picaro, being defined as shameless, deceitful, treacherous and delinquent. In Guzmán there is the problem of the picaro's avowed repentance, but at the time of action of the book, he conforms to the definition of picaro. As well as his criminal properties, the picaro displays a certain humour, or raciness of style. At the time of performance, he enjoys his ingenuity and craftiness; at the time of narration, he relishes them.
- (c) squalid origins. The picaro's characteristic parents are criminals or reprobates of some kind. His early family life is marked by his abrupt and enforced familiarisation with the criminal milieu. There may be a direct contrast with the romance here, but we can leave discussion of such items for the moment.
- (d) lack of domestic stability. The picaro remains a solitary character throughout. Though each narrator marries, the wedding is seen as neither a significant emotional experience nor a move towards stability. Again, this contrasts with <sup>the</sup> chaste pursuit and stable background of the hero of romance.
- (e) the relationship between master and servant. Once the picaro leaves home he must go into service. His masters are uniformly cruel and vicious, despite their varied social ranks. It is thematically significant that the most prevalent form of social relationship in these

---

27. For an explanation of this term, see R.O. Jones, A Literary History of Spain: The Golden Age of Prose and Poetry (London and New York, 1971).

novels is not that of the family or matrimony, but an economically-determined opposition of master and servant.

- (f) the cruelty of life. The pizaro is constantly treated to abuse and cruelty. From his masters and acquaintances he begins to see the harshness of life, often suffering a painful and humiliating initiation (most often described by the author in scatological terms). He is at the mercy of delinquents more ruthless than he is. Through this process of mistreatment, we, as readers, come to see the true viciousness of the world. The veneer of gentility of the various masters only barely masks their avarice, gluttony and corruption. The pizaro lives in a Hobbesian world, before the introduction of any social contract - natural resources are in short supply, and each man is in ardent competition with his fellows. In this competition, the most likely way to succeed is by the efficient use of cruelty.
- (g) the pizaro's counter-attack. Once he realises the state of affairs in the world, the pizaro decides to become as adept at survival as his opponents. He does not adopt the romance virtues of humility and courtesy; rather he takes up the strategy of delinquency. In response to near-starvation, he takes to theft and cunning.

It is now possible to offer a first (partial) definition of the picaresque. The picaresque novel is a form of fiction originating in Spain in the late sixteenth century, wherein an engaging and shameless delinquent of squalid origins narrates his progress through life as a servant. His story is one of continuous mistreatment and abuse, from which he learns that only delinquency will allow him to survive.

The reason for qualifying the definition as partial is that it does not include any thematic characteristics. The characteristics listed are expedients for the presentation of a theme (or several themes), and the definition is incomplete until we can identify (empirically) the theme of the picaresque novel. Incidentally, the characteristics listed are aspects of both the material (content) of the work, and of its form. A definition which fails to incorporate either of these must be rather vacuous. As to themes, consider these words of Stuart Miller:

If the realistic plot shows the operation of probability amid apparent disorder, the romance plot shows the triumph of Fate or Providence over the same apparent disorder... The pattern and meaning of the romance plot contrast absolutely with the episodic plot of the picaresque novel. In the picaresque, we start with life's chaos assaulting the picaresque hero in one

event after another and we watch it continue to do so...No mysterious order emerges to bind events together and bring them to some end...The picaresque plot merely records fragmented happening after fragmented happening.

(The Picaresque Novel, pp. 11-12)

Miller is here showing the relationship which exists between a particular formal characteristic of the picaresque novel (episodic plot) and the distinguishing idea which the picaresque novel displays (the fragmentation of experience). In each of the novels discussed, the innocence and naïveté of the narrator is put to the test of harsh experience and is revealed as inadequate. The narrator in each case takes up the weapons of cunning and treachery as his best defence. The most significant event in each of the novels is the moment the narrator decides he has had enough, and that it is time he defended himself however possible. The main event, then, within picaresque fiction is the violent and abrupt loss of innocence, and the cruel nature of the world is the theme of such novels.

Each hero learns that experience is dominated, not by benign providence or virtue rewarded, but by greed, avarice, and starvation. He learns that life is much more competitive than companionable, and that he must rob and cheat and lie if he is to survive. Each hero also spends time lamenting the randomness or arbitrariness of events, which process he describes as Fortune. We saw Guzmán lament the inconstancy of Fortune when he was arrested; we saw Paul accept <sup>the</sup> fickleness of life when he failed to achieve success in the West Indies; and we saw Lazarillo affronted by chance when beaten by the blind beggar. So, in the picaresque novel, the hero learns of the randomness of existence, and this is conveyed to us by means of the episodic plot. Although Guzmán sees a benign providence behind his harsh experience - 'Afflictions are sent us by God for our good' (I,97) - we have to accept the genuineness of his conversion before we can accept his posture. And, as we saw, the conversion is too obviously in the hero's interest for us to take it in whole-heartedly. If we define the theme of a work as the dominant idea for which all other formal and material features serve as expression, then the theme of the picaresque novel is Fortune and the vicissitudes of chance. The picaresque novel is wholly materialist in its conception of the universe, and such materialism is both revealed and developed within the characteristics listed as (a) to (g) above.

The definition is now complete. However, before moving on, it is appropriate to sound a warning. The definition offered is an ostensive rendering of the known features of the picaresque novel: it is not a





not true that any work with this theme is a picaresque novel. We have only to think of the role of Fortune in Medieval literature, with its vast range of literary forms, to see that there is no necessary identity between Fortune and the picaresque novel.<sup>31</sup> What distinguishes the picaresque is the relationship between the material of the work and the theme, yielding the forceful and sustained treatment of the hazards and the vicissitudes of chance.

It is not intended here to analyse the genesis of the picaresque. Quite possibly, the social context of sixteenth century Spain can be used to explain the adoption and development of such a literary form.<sup>32</sup> In literary terms, we can certainly see the picaresque as a reaction to the heroic romance, and(perhaps) the surprising popular success of Guzmán de Alfarache alone established the genre as an independent form in the eyes of both authors and public. Whatever the case, the restriction of the definition to these three Spanish novels allows a discriminative treatment of the picaresque. It remains possible that analogously Defoe's fiction could be picaresque, if it shared sufficient of the properties listed as (a) to (g) and displayed the theme of Fortune. Before analysing this issue, though, it will be useful to look at two other works often discussed as picaresque - Simplicissimus the Vagabond and The Adventures of Gil Blas de Santillane - to see just what is involved in such categorisation by analogy.

Simplicissimus the Vagabond, written by H.J.C. von Grimmelshausen and published first in 1669, has never been a popular work. However, it merits attention here as the first significant 'picaresque' novel to be published outside Spain (I will leave inverted commas around 'picaresque' until we have discussed the book). Grimmelshausen's hero comes from humble stock and is thrown onto his own resources at an early age. His innocence and gullibility earn him the name 'Simplicissimus', bestowed by a hermit who also teaches him to read and write. Noticeably, Simplicissimus is accorded more training than his Spanish predecessors, and he is now partially armed to face the harsh world,

Now at that time I had no precious  
possession save only a clear conscience

---

31. See here H.R.Patch, The Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Literature (1927, rev., London, 1967).

32. For a discussion of this issue, see Parker, Literature and the Delinquent, pp. 9-14.



and a right pious mind, and that clad  
and surrounded with the purest innocence  
and simplicity. 33.

The narrator (Simplicissimus himself, of course) sees his innocence as an advantage rather than a drawback, and it takes a surprisingly long time for the world's cruelty to become fully apparent. When Fortune does appear, Simplicissimus's reversal is sudden and unmerited. In reply, the narrator takes to delinquency, but only very unwillingly, and his misadventures are more naughty than vicious. Simplicissimus explicitly rejects the life he is forced to lead - 'this restless life was not to my liking' (p. 110) - and he stresses its involuntary nature - 'If I would eat, I needs must steal' (p. 148). Grimmelshausen's approach to the picaresque seems to be one of softening and extenuation. His hero remains much less vicious than Lazaro, Guzmán or Paul, because so much innocence is sustained throughout the book. At times, Simplicissimus is more of a misguided romantic like Don Quixote than a shrewd sharper. He can be described as 'still the same old Simplicissimus who hath not yet studied his Machiavel' (p. 274). Though none of the Spanish characters were readers of The Prince, they had no need to be. For them, the doctrines of self-preservation and enlightened self-interest came naturally. Their solitary pursuit of comfort is very different from Simplicissimus's quest, wherein he is attended by a friend, a character called Herzbruder (i.e. Heartbrother). No such companionship is ever attained in the Spanish novels.

Grimmelshausen's novel concludes by altering another of the characteristics of the Spanish picaresque, the hero's sordid family background. At the end, we discover that Simplicissimus has been the victim of a delusion. The hermit who taught him transpires to be his father, and the ending shows a reconciliation scene, similar to the completed quest motif of the romances, or of Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones. As a rediscovery of family life, and a re-assessment of the narrator's social position, this kind of ending is fundamentally different from the picaresque. The concerns of Simplicissimus extend far beyond mere survival, and there is a much greater awareness of divinity shaping the ends of the book than was ever present in the Spanish works. Notice how easily Simplicissimus repents of his naughty ways,

---

33. Simplicissimus the vagabond, trans. A.T.S. Goodrick (London, 1925), p. 52. It is indicative of the unpopularity of the book that this translation (originally 1912) is the first that I know of.

87

Now although I was then in no wise  
prepared for confession...yet at that  
moment I felt in me such a desire  
to do penance and to lead a better life  
that forthwith I asked for a confessor...  
Thereafter I openly professed the Catholic  
Church, went to confession and to mass  
after absolution received, with all which  
I felt so light and easy at my heart that  
'tis not to be expressed.

(p. 307)

In Guzmán, the significance and sincerity of the conversion were undermined by the morally doubtful position of the penitent. Here, though, the only area of doubt lies in our uncertainty about the evil of the hero's former deeds. The image Simplicissimus uses to describe his change is a significant one - 'Now when Oliver had ended his discourse, I could not enough admire the Providence of God' (p. 274). Even earlier, when Fortune was mentioned, the concept always seemed based on a theistic view of punishment and reward, rather than the picaresque view of arbitrariness,

When Fortune will cast a man down, she  
raiseth him first to the heights, and  
the good God doth faithfully warn every  
man before his fall.

(p. 217)

This conception of moral organisation makes the world of Simplicissimus one wherein virtue is rewarded and vice punished. The religious patterning of the world is radically different from the materialist conceptions in the Spanish picaresque.

One result of this 'softness' of conception is that it makes the hero's process of education much less significant. At no point does Simplicissimus become wholly convinced of the propriety of theft and criminality, and, indeed, he is fairly gently led towards religion. The overall tone of the book is light-hearted and pleasant. The religious theme is used to convey hope, rather than to introduce the notion of damnable sin as it is in Guzmán. It is, we may notice, quite in order for the converted Simpli<sup>c</sup>ssimus to continue jesting and tricking his neighbours, for his delinquency has always been playful rather than culpably wicked. The book is not really concerned, as the Spanish books were concerned, with the problems of survival in a ruthless and competitive environment. Indeed, the virtuous characters end by retreating from the crude world into a kind of gentility. One commentator calls Grimmelshausen 'a Catholic of the Counter-Reformation, who finds the "real" world wicked and repulsive, but deals with it faithfully and at length.'<sup>34</sup> This remark seems rather too

---

34. Henry C. Hatfield, 'Realism in the German Novel', Comparative Literature, III (1951), p. 234.

88

strong (except for the undoubtedly accurate emphasis on the book's length). No real sense of repulsion is generated, for the character of the narrator is sufficiently engaging to make his environment at least temporarily attractive. He is certainly rather uneasy with the worldliness, as when he says that reading romances 'taught me, instead of eloquence, to practice lechery' (p.215). And it is also significant that the most morally whole character in the book is presented as a hermit. Nonetheless, Simplicissimus is never fully repulsed by the world, and his progress is only less absorbing than the progress of the picaresque because the providential world is less capable of surprise than the random, arbitrary world.

Simplicissimus, then, uses many of the devices of the picaresque novel - referring to the scheme above, Grimmelshausen uses those listed as (a) and in an altered form (b), (c), (d), and (g). However, though these devices are used, they express an entirely different theme. The theme of this work is the survival of innocence, and the attainment of comfort by means of innocence - rather like the theme of Oliver Twist in many respects. Grimmelshausen's theme is thus almost directly opposite to the picaresque theme. Instead of showing inconstancy and consequent suffering, he shows the discovery of pattern and consequent comfort. Consequently, to call this book picaresque is to distort fundamentally its theme, and much of its material. The picaresque novel is essentially competitive and harsh, and any attempt to broaden the definition by including Simplicissimus seems to be rendering the term wholly vacuous. Grimmelshausen's introduction of romance motifs of discovery leaves only the pseudo-autobiographical form of the picaresque. It would be misguided to suggest that there was anything wrong or inappropriate about his procedure, but we mis-describe it by using the term 'picaresque'.

A similar process of 'softening' the picaresque can be found in the work of Alain René Lesage, particularly in his Adventures of Gil Blas de Santillane (1715 - 1735). Before publishing this, his best known work, Lesage had shown his attitude to the picaresque in his translation of Guzman de Alfarache, which he freely adapted to meet public demand.<sup>35</sup> The intentions of the translator were clearly stated on the title-page, where readers were assured that the book had been 'purgee des moralités superflues'. The narrative itself was left as in the original, though with Guzman's problematic conversion entirely omitted. In fact, all of Guzman's rhetorical penitence was missing, altering the novel until it becomes a comic account of an enjoyably misspent youth. Lesage did not inform the reader of the extent of his editing. He obviously saw these alterations as improvements, and later editors have followed his example.

---

35. My knowledge of this translation is based on Parker's treatment of it in Literature and the Delinquent, pp. 116-117.

The English edition by Edward Lowell in 1883 states its obligation clearly in the preface,

Following the example of Lesage, the translator has sought to divest the work of the tedious and to modern notions misplaced disquisitions on morality and religion. 36.

Lesage distorted the original text of Guzmán by removing from it its dynamic theme, just as Grimmelshausen lightened his own work by lessening the jeopardy through which his hero moved. A similar move away from the picaresque can be seen at the beginning of Gil Blas, when the eponymous narrator describes his early life,

My father, Blas of Santillane, after having borne arms for a long time in the Spanish service, retired to his native place. There he married a chamber-maid who was not exactly in her teens, and I made my debut on this stage ten months after marriage. They afterwards went to live at Oviedo, where my mother got into service, and my father obtained a situation equally adapted to his capacities as asquire. As their wages were their fortune, I might have got my education as I could, had it not been for an uncle of mine in the town, a canon, by name Gil Perez. 37.

Though we have here a first-person narrative, set in Spain, we must notice the significant differences from the picaresque form as defined earlier. Although Gil's parents are lowly, his family background seems stable, and his legitimacy is stressed. Also, his family seems honest, and even reaches into the clergy. After this opening he spends time at a school, where, although the harshness of the teachers and the feebleness of the learning are stressed, he is allowed some sort of cloistered childhood. These opening scenes are much less severe than those in the picaresque, and even when Gil sets out in the world, he is still not destitute - 'Here I am...with the world before me, as yet my own master, as well as master of a bad mule and forty good ducats' (I, 3).

As the book develops, further emendations of the picaresque are obvious. Like Simplicissimus, Gil Blas remains essentially innocent

---

36. My knowledge of this translation is based on Parker's treatment of it in Literature and the Delinquent, pp. 116-117.

37. The Adventures of Gil Blas of Santillane, intro. Anatole Le Braz (Everyman ed., 2 vols., London and New York, 1909), I, 1.



throughout. The mercenary self-interest of the pícaro does appear - '...all men love two hands in their neighbour's purse, though only one in their own' (I, 22). However, this is ~~ann~~<sup>ad</sup>ounced by Captain Rolando in one of the many interpolated tales, not by Gil himself. Another difference lies in the role of servitude in the book. Unlike the experiences of the pícaros we have seen, Gil finds his masters an incompetent but not wholly malicious crowd. Overall, Lesage seizes on certain aspects of the picaresque which accord to the type of novel he wants to write. He adopts the ambulatory narrative and the first-person narration. He makes some use of the low-life milieu but makes his hero's sojourn there purely temporary. Not even the villainous Captain Rolando remains ruthless, and he is transformed into a more romantic conception of the misunderstood outlaw - a kind of Robin Hood, or Caleb Williams figure. In short, Lesage sentimentalises the harshness of the Spanish novels, and adopts the ambulatory narrative as a device which allows him freedom of association of characters, without having to accept the randomness of the picaresque. The hero is allowed to meet various characters on his travels, each of whom tells a tale, but the journey as a whole has a destination and his eventual arrival at stability shows an entirely different kind of patterning from that of the picaresque.

At the end of the book, Gil has found economic and domestic stability, and he leaves the reader with a complacent summary of his achievement,

For these three years, reader, I  
have lived a life of unmixed bliss  
in this beloved society. To perfect  
my satisfaction, heaven has deigned  
to send me two smiling babes, whose  
education will be the amusement of my  
declining years; and if ever husband  
might venture to hazard so bold an  
hypothesis, I devoutly believe myself  
to be their father (II, 385)

There is no sense here of the arbitrariness of Fortune that we found in Lazarillo and in El Buscón. In those works, the hero's position at the end was as unstable and uncertain as ever, his only certainty being that nothing could be taken as certain. In Gil Blas, as in Simplicissimus, the shaping of the novel reveals greater confidence in Providence. For this reason, it seems reasonable to refrain from calling either of these works picaresque novels. Certainly, they adopt many of the picaresque conventions, as outlined, but they seem to be pointing to an entirely different theme, and to be selecting only certain aspects of the picaresque



which are consistent with this theme. If we were to call Lesage and Grimmelshausen picaresque novelists, we would be distorting their achievements. It would be foolish to say that either the picaresque writers or Lesage and Grimmelshausen were the more realistic, in the sense defined in the previous chapter. The difference between their books is not one to be defined in terms of technique, but in terms of (for want of a better word) ideology. The picaresque writers adopt techniques of verisimilitude to display the random world, wherein self-interest is the best means of procedure, though even that is uncertain. Lesage and Grimmelshausen also use techniques<sup>of</sup> verisimilitude, but they show a world wherein Providence triumphs, where virtue is rewarded and innocence can survive.

How useful, then, is the discriminative term 'picaresque' as an approach to Defoe? It is obvious that when Defoe's works have been called picaresque, the term has been taken very broadly, as for example in the case of Sir Walter Scott's remarks,

But whatever way he acquired his knowledge of low life, De Foe certainly possessed it in the most extensive sense, and applied it in the composition of several works of fiction, in the style termed by the Spaniards Gusto Picaresco, of which no man was ever a greater master. 38.

Here we have a very loose usage of the term. Scott also offered an analysis of Lesage in similar terms, and so obscured the very distinction I have been trying to make about the novelist's treatment of his subject. A more recent commentator has described the qualities of the picaresque as 'variety, adventurousness, colour, irreverence, a lack of guiding principle', and has gone on to say that 'Defoe's novels are in the picaresque tradition, but it is not adequate to describe them as picaresque'.<sup>39</sup> We may have many reservations about Kettle's definition of the picaresque - for instance, what can he mean by 'colour'? - but his point about Defoe's relation to the picaresque writers seems apt. I want to go on to argue that in Defoe's fiction we see the use of realistic technique, as defined, and obvious similarities to the picaresque. However, on this centrally divisive issue of chance versus providence, Defoe's fiction is ~~centrally~~ confused and

---

38. Sir Walter Scott, On Novelists and Fiction, ed. Ioan Williams (New York, 1968), p. 166.

39. Arnold Kettle, An Introduction to the English Novel (2nd ed., London, 1967), I, 52.

tentative. In each of the books we will find evidence for each of the two views, and yet such confusion is never resolved. By calling Defoe's fiction picaresque, then, an important confusion is being obscured, and to assert, as one critic does, that 'In Robinson Crusoe...the action and characters are shaped by the dogmatism of a special belief, the belief in Providence' seems simply wrong.<sup>40</sup>

By defining the picaresque in terms of its display of arbitrariness, and distinguishing it from fiction which displays a confidence in providence, the twin poles of recent Defoe criticism have been set apart. Each of Defoe's novels shows an individual retrospection over life, and an analysis of its travails. In the words of a recent commentator, 'Always in Defoe's novels, man is placed in a hostile setting and is called upon to impose a pattern upon experience.'<sup>41</sup> It seems useful to analyse Defoe's novels in this light. First of all, does he use the conventions of the picaresque? And if so, what kind of pattern can be discerned in his characters' lives? Is it the picaresque pattern of chance as a dominant factor? Or do the characters convincingly discern the workings of Providence? I have already suggested that the fictions are more confused and muddled than these simple questions would allow. Whatever the answer, such an analysis may help to resolve the confusions in much of the recent writing on Defoe. A recent editor of Robinson Crusoe uses this very distinction between chance and providence to provide his estimate of Defoe as an artist,

It is probably too much to claim for Defoe that he was enough of a conscious artist completely to balance and reconcile the forces of indeterminate life and those of moral pattern that he sets in motion in Robinson Crusoe. 42

If we see this conflict between chance and fortune as being as central as this to Defoe's fiction, we can see why the term 'picaresque' has so often

---

40. Barbara Hardy, The Appropriate Form: An Essay on the Novel (London, 1964, corrected ed., 1971), p.53.

41. John Chalker, The English Georgian: A Study in the Development of a Form (London, 1969), pp. 12-13.

42. Robinson Crusoe, ed. J.D.Crowley (London, 1972), pp. xxi-xxii.

been applied to his work.

Before going on to examine Defoe's fiction in detail, it is worth pointing out that the conflict between fortune and providence is apparent in earlier English fiction. We have seen the complexities of the twin structure of Guzmán, evident in Mabbe's translation for English audiences. The providential elements of that work are much more strongly apparent in John Bunyan's The Life and Death of Mr. Badman (1680), where the villainous protagonist is eventually brought down by the direct intervention of Providence. Bunyan's moral severity is, of course, wholly at odds with the picaresque as seen in Lazarillo and El Buscón. More in keeping with the raciness of the picaresque is the bawdy, extremely long novel by Richard Head and Francis Kirkman, The English Rogue described in the Life of Meriton Latroon (1665 - 1671). The authors of this novel do make some claims to didactic intent:

...the intent of his writing was  
to shew the deformity of vice, that  
everyone might shun it. 43.

However, the book itself seems to have been written (or compiled) for less solemn purposes. Though the authors were clearly influenced by the Spanish picaresque, their borrowings were much wider. One disillusioned critic offers a recipe for the production of similar fiction: 'Take from two or three dozen Elizabethan pamphlets of different kinds, but principally of the "coney-catching" variety, and string them together by making a batch of shadowy personages tell them to each other when they are not acting in them.' The result of such a confection is, we are told, 'a muck-heap'.<sup>44</sup>

It seems then as though the Spanish picaresque was surprisingly uninfluential in England before Defoe. Various critics have at times offered arguments claiming a picaresque influence on a number of texts. For example, J.J. Jusserand claimed that Thomas Nashe's The Unfortunate Traveller (1594) was 'the best specimen of the picaresque tale in English anterior to Defoe'.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, James Winny has seen the picaresque . .

---

43. Richard Head, The English Rogue described in the Life of Meriton Latroon (fifth ed., London, 1669), preface, sig. A2r.

44. George Saintsbury, The English Novel (London and New York, 1913), p. 50.

45. See his The English Novel in the Time of Shakespeare, trans. E. Lee (London, 1890), p. 380. Jusserand's views have been convincingly challenged by F.W. Chandler, The Literature of Roguery (1907, reprinted, New York, 1958), p. 198.

94

as a major influence on the works of Henry Chettle, and has claimed that this influence is detectable in Piers Plainness: Seven Years' Prenticeship (1595).<sup>46</sup> Neither of these assertions seems acceptable, if we remember that the only Spanish work available in English at this time was Lazarillo de Tormes, which is most unlike the work of either Nashe or Chettle.

As we can now see, any assertion that Defoe's fiction is picaresque stresses his innovativeness rather than his reliance on tradition. Yet it is still possible to find in earlier English fiction a relationship between realistic fiction and the emphasis on chance. Though there is no clearly discernable influence of the picaresque, the fiction of Aphra Behn shows a reliance on Fortune as the dominant force in life, rather than on Providence. As a realistic writer, she stresses authenticity and verifiability rather than edification:

...this little History...has  
but this Merit to recommend it,  
that it is Truth...For however  
it may be imagin'd that Poetry  
(my Talent) has so greatly the  
Ascendent over me, that all I  
write must pass for Fiction, I  
now desire to have it understood  
that this is Reality, and Matter  
of Fact...I do not pretend here  
to entertain you with a feign'd  
Story, or any Thing piec'd  
together with Romantick Accidents;  
to a Tittle, is Truth. To a  
great Part of the Main I was  
myself an Eye-witness; and what  
I did not see, I was confirm'd  
of by Actors in the Intrigue...<sup>47</sup>

It is in fact most unlikely that Behn was a witness to any such events, but it is interesting that she should make such strong claims to authenticity. Throughout all her work she consistently claims to be giving accurate reports of genuine events. She even tries to reinforce the illusion of truthfulness 'by providing numerous specific and strategic pieces of information about the narrator herself'.<sup>48</sup>

- 
46. The Descent of Euphues: Three Elizabethan Romance Stories, ed. James Winny (Cambridge, 1957), introduction.
47. The Fair Jilt, in The Works of Aphra Behn, ed. Montague Summers (5 vols., London, 1915), 70-74.  
See also V, 129 and 262. Further references will be to this edition.
48. George Guffey, 'Aphra Behn's Oroonoko: Occasion and Accomplishment,' Two English Novelists: Aphra Behn and Anthony Trollope. Papers Read at a Clark Library Seminar, May 11, 1974 (Los Angeles, 1975), p.4.



The tales in which these pseudo-facts occur are mostly light romances, wherein heroines and their lovers fall in and out of love with each other, and sometimes suffer as a result. The important point for the study of Defoe is that the over-riding theme of Fortune which controls events is very uncertainly handled. When Behn announces her theme, she speaks gravely of the powers of Fortune:

THO' Love, all soft and flattering  
promises nothing but Pleasures; yet  
its Consequences are often sad and  
fatal. It is not enough to be in  
love, to be happy; since Fortune,  
who is capricious, and takes delight  
to trouble the Repose of the most  
elevated and virtuous, has very  
little Respect for passionate and  
tender Hearts, when she designs  
to produce strange Adventures. 49

Behn offers a number of these 'Adventures', and in all of them we see uncertainty about the arbitrariness or otherwise of this idea of Fortune. Like the medieval conception, Behn's idea of Fortune recognises those areas of human life outwith individual control. What she is uncertain of is whether or not those areas are subject only to chance, or to the distribution of punishment and reward.

The vocabulary used to describe the workings of Fortune is remarkably elusive and ambiguous. Oroonoko, for instance, sees himself as 'abandoned by Fortune', and looks forward to his 'More welcome Destiny'.<sup>50</sup> Elsewhere, Fortune is invoked in essentially the same ambiguous manner: '...had Fortune been just...', '...it is thou, Child, whom Fortune makes use of...', 'Fortune had not set me in such a station...', '...the sad subject of the Capriciousness of Fortune...', '...submitted to her Fate, as a thing destin'd by Heaven itself...', 'they could not avoid the malicious Influence of their Stars...', 'the Persecution of Fortune'.<sup>51</sup> These diverse and inconsistent references to the powers of Fortune are intriguing, for they seem to equivocate between a secular and a Christian way of looking at the world. She seems unsure as to whether all changes of circumstances are dictated by moral forces (as Bunyan would believe) or simply by chance (as in the picaresque novel). Even the titles of her books betray the role of chance and luck - The Unfortunate Happy Lady, The Lucky Mistake, The Unfortunate Bride, or The Unhappy Mistake.

---

49. Agnes de Castro, Summers ed., V, 213.

50. Oroonoko; or, The Royal Slave, Summers ed., V, 157-158.

51. These quotations come from various novels. See Summers, Vol.V passim.

96

The resemblance between these and the odd title of Defoe's last prose fiction - Roxana: The Fortunate Mistress (1724) - shows the possibilities of a relationship between them.

Behn's uncertainties about the organisation of life are, I believe, shared in Defoe's fiction. Behn can state her uncertainty baldly in a conjunction like '...however Providence or Accident, if you please order'd it'.<sup>52</sup> The picaresque novel was much more rigorously materialistic in its presentation of experience. What may account for the difference is Behn's emphasis on romantic love as a disruptive force. Whatever the explanation, we can certainly see that her equivocations are central to any full understanding of her fiction. In Robinson Crusoe, as we shall see, the central character understands his own experience as being the result of Providence's control. He sees a pattern in his otherwise disparate adventures which leads to his conversion and his eventual deliverance. However, we can remain unconvinced that the book as a whole presents Crusoe's experience in as unified a way as he seems to believe, and there seem to me to be grounds for seeing in Crusoe the kind of uncertainty and equivocation that we see in Aphra Behn. So too in Moll Flanders and Roxana, we shall see that there is reason to doubt the reliability of the way the heroines make sense of their experiences.

The analysis of realism and of picaresque has allowed us to formulate the questions to be applied to Defoe's fiction. How does the novel (as opposed perhaps to the narrator) present the world? Is the universe seen as materialistic or as Providential? The question of whether Defoe's novels are, or are not, picaresque has become a subsidiary question whose answer will depend on the answers to these two more fundamental questions. As we shall see, Defoe does display the conventions of the picaresque novel at times - most noticeably in Moll Flanders and Colonel Jack. However, it is unhelpful to call his work picaresque without extensive qualification, as such a bald statement overlooks and obscures the complexity and interest of Defoe's work. Defoe often deals in the picaresque world of fraught and hazardous existence. His protagonists undergo disaster, and often exist within the ruthlessly competitive world of the Spanish picaresque novels. Their home lives are as unstable of those of Lazarillo or Paul, and their survival is as difficult. However, into this harsh world, Defoe intrudes the hand of Providence. His

---

52. The Unfortunate Happy Lady: A True History,  
Summers ed., V, 56.

protagonists all, at some point, recognise a controlling destiny, superior to any social or economic forces. In the ensuing chapters, we may examine the efficacy of this power.

It remains to be seen whether Defoe gives a full, consistent account of Providence, or whether he equivocates as much as Aphra Behn. I intend to show that the theme of Providence in his work is only partially rendered. In each of the major novels (as in much of the non-fiction) there are contrary impulses towards religious faith and a rationalist desire for material explanation. The central issues in each novel - respectively work, love, and the family - reveal the limitations of the Providential view, but also the limitations of a wholly rationalist one. Lacking the thematic single-mindedness of the picaresque, Defoe's fiction becomes much more discursive, and its emphases often lie in conflict. I will argue that this conflict is unresolved, but that Defoe's work is not to be dismissed as a result. Though the themes of his books may be inconsistent, at odds with each other, or simply confused, we shall see Defoe increasingly stress the narrator's confusion rather than his own. What appears in Robinson Crusoe to be uncertainty on Defoe's part, over whether Crusoe's resourcefulness, or Providential intrusion, is responsible for Crusoe's success, becomes in Moll Flanders an analysis of the narrator's self-deception and attempts at self-justification. By the time he came to write Roxana, Defoe had found a way of incorporating all the uncertainties and doubts into the consciousness of the narrator. It is these issues which we will now go on to explore.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FORTUNE AND PROVIDENCE IN ROBINSON CRUSOE

Robinson Crusoe (1719) remains both Defoe's most widely read and least well understood fiction. In the Introduction we saw just how popular and influential a book it was during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and this wide public acclaim has lasted up to the present day. Some of the adaptations current in the nineteenth century are still read, and the book has been filmed at least three times, most interestingly by Luis Bunuel in 1952.

Bunuel's film raises some of the critical issues which have been most often discussed in the last thirty years. In his film, Crusoe is an imperceptive, rather foolish figure, who misunderstands most of what happens to him. Crusoe's belief in God is made an important feature of his character, but the scene where he talks to God is made heavily ironic. Crusoe speaks into a valley, and his own voice echoes loudly around him. God, we are to believe, is only Crusoe himself projected onto the outside world. Bunuel's strident antipathy to all forms of religion dominates the film, and his Crusoe is a self-important middle-class merchant who uses his God to justify his own behaviour.

Crusoe's relationship with his God has dominated recent critical discussion. The point at issue is whether we can take Crusoe's claims to religion seriously, or whether they are to be taken as unconvincing, even ironic, moralising. We saw that the picaresque novel had no room for a God of any kind, since its world was wholly materialistic. When God was introduced, as in Guzmán de Alfarache, a radical reinterpretation of all the previously-narrated experiences was required, and serious formal problems ensued. We saw, too, that Aphra Behn's fiction equivocated between a secular and a religious conception of experience. Defoe's methods of presenting the spiritual experiences of his protagonists have led to wide disagreement amongst critics, and the critical problems remain unsolved.

Put broadly, there are two kinds of response to Defoe's spiritual concern. First of all, there are those critics who stress Defoe's materialism and his concern with individual self-assertion. Thus, Ian Watt largely dismisses Defoe's religious concerns;<sup>1</sup> John J. Richetti talks of Crusoe's religious experience as a symptom of schizophrenia;<sup>2</sup> and

---

1. See Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel (1957, Penguin ed., Harmondsworth, 1963), pp. 78-85.

2. John J. Richetti, Defoe's Narratives: Situations and Structures (Oxford, 1975), p. 42.



Pierre Macherey refers to Providence in the book as 'a mere screen'.<sup>3</sup> For all of these critics, Defoe has at best a superficial commitment to Providence, and his central character's protestations are to be looked at quizzically.

On the other hand, there are a number of writers who see Defoe much more as a committed Puritan, with a genuine and affective belief in the power of Providence. Maximillian E. Novak argues such a case on the grounds of Defoe's obvious interest in the theories of Natural Law.<sup>4</sup> Both J. Paul Hunter and G. A. Starr see in all of Defoe's work, but especially in *Crusoe*, a great debt to Puritan thinking and the literary approach of the spiritual autobiography.<sup>5</sup> Such critics take *Crusoe*'s references to Providence much more seriously, and come to see in the whole book an exploration of life as a religious and spiritual experience. This second reading has become the prevailing one. In the words of Pat Rogers, 'The most striking single development in our recent understanding of the novel has lain in the rediscovery of a pervasive spiritual motif.'<sup>6</sup>

There can be little doubt that the book is presented as a revelation of the workings of Providence. In the Preface, which is unsigned, the 'Editor' makes serious claims for his book's gravity of purpose:

The Story is told with Modesty,  
with Seriousness, and with a  
religious Application of Events  
to the Uses to which wise Men  
always apply them (viz.) to the  
Instruction of others by this

- 
4. Maximillian E. Novak, Defoe and the Nature of Man (Oxford, 1963), pp. 22-65.
  5. J. Paul Hunter, The Reluctant Pilgrim: Defoe's Emblematic Method and the Quest for Form in Robinson Crusoe (Baltimore, 1966); G. A. Starr, Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography (Princeton, N.J., 1965) and Defoe and Casuistry (Princeton, N.J., 1971). See also William H. Halewood, 'Religion and Invention in Robinson Crusoe; EC, XIV (1964), 339-351 and Martin J. Greif, 'The Conversion of Robinson Crusoe,' SEL, VI (1966), 551-574.
  6. Pat Rogers, Robinson Crusoe (London, 1979), p. 51. Rogers makes an interesting remark elsewhere in this book when he says 'Few people now believe that Crusoe has anything to do with the picaresque as such' (p. 93). Though very few serious literary critics believe such a thing, the idea is still surprisingly prevalent when historians discuss the novel. See, for example, the reference from Lawrence Stone, quoted above.

Example, and to justify and honour  
the Wisdom of Providence in all  
the Variety of our Circumstances,  
let them happen how they will. 7

The avowed intention to 'justify' the ways of Providence alerts us to the way Providence actually functions throughout the book. One comparison that can be made with the picaresque is that Crusoe's life is continually imperilled. He feels threatened and endangered all through the storms and on the isolation of his island. Part of the time this danger is physical - he is liable to attack by animals or, later, by cannibals; There are also the necessities of survival, which, in his position, are not easy to obtain. Yet his peril is also expressed as spiritual and throughout the book Providence is seen as an admonitory force, even as a threat, rather than as a source of comfort. The justification of Providence is that through threat it leads to deliverance.

The relationship between Crusoe's religious sense and the dangers he is in is one of the most interesting parts of the novel. It is significant that one writer has seen in the sense of danger a justification for the belief in Providence:

We should never forget how insecure life still was. Overseas trade faced the perils of piracy, shipwreck, the hostility of distant powers, scurvy, etc. But life at home also was affected by natural catastrophes, the fires to which wooden buildings were so liable, unstable prices, arbitrary taxation, famine, pestilence, sudden and early deaths. All this with no insurance...The margin between success and failure was very narrow: a man might obtain a windfall by, for example, a prudent marriage; but he could be ruined by factors quite outside his control. It is difficult for us...to recapture the profound emotional instability

- 
7. Daniel Defoe, The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner (1719), ed. J. Donald Crowley (London, 1972), p. 1. All later references will be to this edition, and will be incorporated into the text, after the abbreviation RC.

of our forefathers. Naturally they believed in theories of predestination (Man's fate is in God's hands, not his own; success justified). Naturally they wanted to propitiate this very relevant God - whether by ceremonies or by virtuous conduct. 8

Great stress is laid upon Crusoe's instability throughout the book, as we shall see. The point to be made here is that there is no necessary conflict between the religious sentiments expressed in the Preface and the apparently threatening world seen in the main body of the text. There may be a danger of explaining Crusoe's religion away if we stress the dangers he is under, but we should not underestimate the seriousness of the book's commitment to Providence.

Again in comparison with the picaresque, we can describe the world through which the protagonist moves as hostile and unaccommodating. One commentator has even seen it as a 'Hobbesian "state of nature", transposed into a social world, atomistic, -volatile, where the mere existence of another person, is a threat to the self.'<sup>9</sup> In such a world, the sense of being continually watched is much more a source of anguish and jeopardy than of comfort and stability. Crusoe's consistent concern with the hand of Providence guiding his actions becomes a search for meaning and pattern in his own existence, after the manner of the spiritual autobiography. However, in Defoe's book there is much more emphasis on the dangers of the world, and we can also detect within it a certain uneasiness in the handling of Providence. There can be no doubt of both Defoe's and Crusoe's commitment to the idea of effective Providence, but the unease with which it is handled may reveal to the reader some of the less sure components in the book's structure. Certainly, with all the sense of jeopardy and fear he displays, there seems to be little evidence for 'Crusoe's cheerful confidence'.<sup>10</sup>

Though Crusoe's original home life is much more comfortable and stable than the picaresque, it is still possible to see in Defoe's presentation of it a degree of uncertainty. Crusoe tells us he comes from 'a good Family' (RC, p. 3). His father is German, though settled in York, and retired from trade. He lives quietly with his family.

---

8. Christopher Hill, The Pelican Economic History of Britain Volume Two: Reformation to Industrial Revolution (Harmondsworth, 1969), pp. 109-110.

9. Homer O. Brown, 'The Displaced Self in the Novels of Daniel Defoe,' ELH, XXXVIII (1971), 566.

10. David Blewett, Defoe's Art of Fiction: Robinson Crusoe, Moll Flanders, Colonel Jack and Roxana (Toronto, 1979) p.55.

Crusoe describes his own identity as follows:-

...I was called Robinson Kreutznaer; but by the usual Corruption of words in England, we are now called, nay we call our selves, and write our name Crusoe, and so my Companions always call'd me.

(RC, p. 3)

Why does Defoe provide this seemingly irrelevant detail?

It might simply be one of his devices of authentication. The detail is so irrelevant that there is no reason why he should lie about it. That is one possible explanation, but more can be made of this odd addition. It has been seen as one of those occasions where Defoe's undisciplined creative skills run away with him, and he inserts a fact which has no thematic significance - an example of what Ian Watt calls Defoe's 'onomastic nonchalance'.<sup>11</sup> However, more recent scholarship has seen that Defoe's names have symbolic significance. 'Kreutznaer' translates as 'fool of the cross', and some critics have seen the name as appropriate to Crusoe's career.<sup>12</sup>

It is certainly striking that each of Defoe's pseudo-autobiographies is narrated by a character who has his <sup>her</sup> or ~~name~~ conferred at some point during their tale.<sup>13</sup> In Captain Singleton (1720), the narrator is spirited away from his parents by gypsies at the opening of the book, and it is they who confer his name on him. He describes the process early in the book:

...and this Woman, tho' I was continually dragged about with her, from one Part of the Country to another, yet never let me want for any thing, and I called her Mother; tho' she told me at last, she was not my Mother, but that she had bought me for Twelve Shillings of another Woman, who told her that my name was Bob

- 
- 11. Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel, p. 109. See also Watt's 'The Naming of Characters in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding,' RES XXV (1949); pp. 322 - 338.
  - 12. See Hunter, The Reluctant Pilgrim, p. 154n. Hunter also sees significance in the anglicised name, comparing it with Timothy Cruso, a classmate of Defoe's and later a well-known author of 'guide' literature. See The Reluctant Pilgrim, pp. 47-50. For another symbolic interpretation, see Blewett, Defoe's Art of Fiction, p.23n.
  - 13. I am indebted here to Homer O. Brown, 'The Displaced Self in the Novels of Daniel Defoe,' pp. 562-563.



Singleton, not Robert, but plain  
 Bob; for it seems they never knew  
 by what name I was Christen'd. 14

The fact that his name is conferred so casually should not blind us to its significance. 'Bob' is a generic name for any man, like Jack, or Tom, Dick and Harry, and 'Singleton' is a title for a 'very/foolish silly Fellow'.<sup>15</sup> So the radical instability of Singleton's background has left him alone (Singleton), innocent and unprotected. His connections are largely criminal - he tells us that his gypsy Mother 'happened in Process of Time to be hang'd' (CS, p. 2). The environment he is placed in, which names him, is hostile, and leaves him in jeopardy. Of the other narrators, Roxana is given her name at a dance, and that name is known to only a few of the participants in the novel.<sup>16</sup> And Moll Flanders only gives us her criminal alias.<sup>17</sup>

In each of these books, the central figure is placed in a hostile environment, and that environment confers upon the narrator a name. To some extent, that is what happens to Robinson Crusoe. The environment of York may not be hostile, but it is foreign and estranging. It is noticeable that Crusoe describes the change in his name as the 'Corruption' of words. The reference to corruption may be casual, but it is not without point. Crusoe is reminding us that the stability of his domestic life is only transient, and that there is a history of wandering in his family.

Further references to instability and jeopardy are introduced immediately after this. Crusoe refers to his two brothers, whose careers were as violent and erratic as his is to be:

I had two elder Brothers, one  
 of which was Lieutenant Collonel  
 to an English Regiment of Foot  
 in Flanders...and was killed at  
 the Battle near Dunkirk against  
 the Spaniards: What became of  
 my second Brother I never knew

- 
14. Daniel Defoe, The Life, Adventures and Piracies of the Famous Captain Singleton (1720), ed. Shiv K. Kumar (London, 1969), p. 2. Further references will be to this edition, cited as CS.
  15. See Eric Partridge, The Penguin Dictionary of Historical Slang (Harmondsworth, 1972), pp. 91, 845.
  16. Daniel Defoe, Roxana, The Fortunate Mistress (1724), ed. Jane Jack (London, 1969), p. 174. Further references will be to this edition, cited as Rox.
  17. Daniel Defoe, The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders (1722), ed. G.A. Starr (London, 1971), p. 7. Further references will be to this edition, cited as MF.

any more than my Father or  
Mother did know what was become  
of me.

(RC, p. 3)

The only parallel occurrence of brothers in Defoe's fiction appears in Colonel Jack (1733), where the narrator has two 'brothers' (actually his nurse's illegitimate and legitimate children) whose careers form an admonitory pattern for his own.<sup>18</sup> The introduction of the brothers in Crusoe serves to remind us that outwith the domestic comfort of York, the world is uncertain, hazardous and threatening. It is striking that just after this quoted passage, Crusoe first mentions his 'rambling Thoughts' and attributes to them his 'Life of Misery' (RC, p. 3).

In the previous chapter we saw how the picaro was forced to leave home by various kinds of necessity. Crusoe too leaves home, but in his case he does so voluntarily. His departure is very important in any interpretation of the novel, and various accounts of it have been offered. M.E. Novak attributes the decision to leave to 'Crusoe's personal characteristics', which he lists as imprudence, lack of a trade, lack of desire to settle and wanderlust.<sup>19</sup> However, a different, and, in my view, more acceptable analysis has been given by G.A. Starr, who accuses Novak of giving too individualised a portrait of Crusoe. Starr's argument is that we should not account for Crusoe's behaviour by referring to his individual, or idiosyncratic, psychology, but to the 'wildness that Defoe found characteristic of unregenerate man in general, and of youth in particular'.<sup>20</sup>

Starr's argument that Crusoe's leaving home is a sin rather than just an act of folly is reinforced by Crusoe's own interpretation of events. Crusoe himself does not see his departure as an act of economic self-assertion. He says he has behaved 'against the Will, nay the Commands of my Father, and against all the Entreaties and Perswasions of my Mother and other Friends' (RC, p. 3). He later laments his decision to leave, and wishes to become 'a true repenting Prodigal' (RC, p. 8). It seems perfectly fair then to talk of the departure as a sin. As Starr says, 'the sinfulness of the deed consists in its violation of paternal, social, and divine order'.<sup>21</sup>

---

18. See Daniel Defoe, The History and Remarkable Life of the Truly Honourable Col. Jacque (1722), ed. S.H. Monk (London, 1965), p. 4. Further references will be to this edition, cited as CJ.

19. M.E. Novak, Economics and the Fiction of Daniel Defoe (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1962), p. 32.

20. Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography, p. 77.

21. Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography, p. 82.

However, doubts can be raised about how fully Defoe has made the act's sinfulness apparent. We have already seen, by Crusoe's mention of his dead and his vanished brother, that the social order is not by any means static. Similarly, his partial estrangement in York indicates a more mobile conception of society than Starr offers. Much weight has thus to be put on Crusoe's father, and his speech about the 'middle State' (RC, p. 4) and its delights. Crusoe is told that the middle station is 'the best State in the World, the most suited to human Happiness, not exposed to the Miseries and Hardships, the Labour and Sufferings of the mechanick Part of Mankind, and not embarrass'd with the Pride, Luxury, Ambition and Envy of the upper Part of Mankind' (RC, p. 4). The speech contains Biblical reference, and warns Crusoe that God will not bless him if he leaves home. It ends with his father in tears, weeping for the memory of Crusoe's dead brother.

All this is very impressive, and moves Crusoe to (temporary) agreement. However, there are slight doubts raised about the integrity of the speech, and about Crusoe's understanding of it. Ian Watt dismisses the religious aspects of the speech:

...the argument between his parents and himself is a debate, not about filial duty or religion, but about whether going or staying is likely to be the most advantageous course materially: both sides accept the economic argument as primary. 22

Watt's argument seems rather overstated, for what moves Crusoe is not material concern, but the sight of his father's tears. Yet there are still grounds for being uncertain about the speech. Despite the stringent advocacy of temperance, the speech is rather undercut by Crusoe's remark about it taking place in 'his Chamber, where he was confined by the Gout' (RC, p. 4). Gout, wrongly, has traditionally been associated with excess, particularly alcoholic excess. In this context it is worth remembering that Crusoe's father is German. In The True Born Englishman, Defoe characterised the Germans as follows:

Drunkenness, the Darling Favourite of Hell,  
Chose Germany to rule; and rules so well  
No Subjects more obsequiously obey,  
None please so well, or are so pleas'd as they.  
The cunning Artist manages so well,  
He lets them Bow to Heav'n and Drink to Hell.  
If but to Wine and him they Homage pay,  
He cares not to what Deity they Pray,  
What God they worship most, or in what way.

Whether by Luther, Calvin, or by Rome,  
They sail for Heav'n by Wine he steers them home. 23

This would certainly be very flimsy evidence from which to construct a picture of Crusoe's father as a lachrymose sot, sentimentally using any rhetoric available to keep his last son at home. Still, the details are there, and however insignificant they are taken to be, they open the possibilities of disagreeing with Crusoe's view of his own experience. For Defoe to have a German advocating temperance looks very <sup>much</sup> like an understated joke.<sup>24</sup> It is also noticeable that though Crusoe's father is described as a 'wise and grave Man' (RC, p. 4) not one of his three sons has paid any attention to his advice.

Overall, the opening pages reveal to us a world which is violent and dangerous, and open up the possibilities of interpreting events in ways other than Crusoe himself does. His departure from home need not be interpreted as a sin, though that is how Crusoe sees it. The creation of a new home is clearly one of Crusoe's main endeavours on his island.<sup>25</sup> Also, he uses the language of contrition when his departure is attended by unfortunate consequences. He casually enlists on a ship in Hull, and when a frightening storm breaks out, he sees it as 'the Judgment of Heaven for my wicked leaving my Father's House, and abandoning my Duty' (RC, p. 8). However, this episode is soon undercut when older sailors dismiss the violent weather as 'but a Cap full of Wind' (RC, p. 9). Crusoe gets drunk with the other sailors, and his contrition is forgotten.

The most explicit statements about sin and contrition occur after this. A second storm breaks out, and this time even the older sailors are terrified. In his description of the events, Crusoe is more concerned with logistics than with piety. Afterwards, however, he emphasises the idea of the tempest being a judgment from Heaven, a warning that he should desist from sea-faring. Crusoe even refers to himself as the prodigal son (RC, p. 14), and the Providential intrusion is confirmed by a ship-mate's father, who says:

---

23. The True Born Englishman (1701), in Selected Poetry and Prose of Daniel Defoe, ed. Michael F. Shrugue (New York, 1968, pp. 45-46.

24. Many examples of Defoe's condemnation of excess are quoted by Hans H. Andersen, 'The Paradox of Trade and Morality in Defoe,' MP, XXXIX, (1941) 22-47. See also the recurrent emphasis on the dangers of drink in CJ. Jack's Drunkenness leads him onto a ship bound for the West Indies (PP. 109-111), and his first wife reappears as a slave, broken by alcoholism (p. 240).

25. See Pat Rogers, 'Crusoe's Home,' EC, XXIV (1974), 375-390.



...you ought never to go to Sea any more, you ought to take this for a plain and visible Token that you are not a Seafaring Man...you see what a Taste Heaven has given you of what you are to expect if you persist...if you do not go back, where-ever you go, you will meet with nothing but Disasters and Disappointments... (RC, p.15)

Here, a violent disruption in the phenomenal world is treated as a direct intrusion of Providence. It is striking that on the evidence of this first intrusion, Robinson is not to be coaxed gently back to virtue, but shocked out of vice in the way that Bunyan's Mr. Badman was frightened.

Throughout Defoe's work there is an uneasy alliance between resignation to Providence and the hectic activities of the narrators of the novels. Defoe himself seems uncertain about the degree to which Providence can be said to be in control. In A Journal of the Plague Year (1722), his narrator tries to establish that the plague is both a Providential intrusion, and a phenomenon to be explained materially. This leads to rather uneasy passages of rationalisation:

But when I am speaking of the Plague, as a Distemper arising from natural Causes, we must consider it as it really was propagated by natural Means, nor is it at all the less a Judgment for its being under the Conduct of human Causes and Effects; for as the divine Power has form'd the whole Scheme of Nature in its Course; so the same Power thinks fit to let his own Actings with Men, whether of Mercy or Judgment, go on in the ordinary Course of Natural Causes, and he is pleased to act by those natural Causes as the ordinary Means; excepting and reserving to himself nevertheless a Power to act in a supernatural way when he sees occasion. 26

In fact, 'H. F.' is the most passive of all Defoe's narrators. He remains in London throughout the visitation, and makes few efforts to defend himself against it. The fact that he survives is seen as an act of Mercy on the part of Providence.

---

26. Daniel Defoe, A Journal of the Plague Year (1722), ed. Louis Landa (London, 1969), pp. 193 - 194. All further references will be to this edition, cited as JPY.

Defoe refers frequently to Providence as a source of 'Judgment'. In The Review, we are often told of Providence's intrusions into historical affairs:-

...tho' I have had a large share of Misfortunes in the World, and no Man more; yet it has pleas'd Providence hitherto, to keep me out of such Hands.

(III, 135b)

...I look up, and not Examining into his Ways, the Sovereignty of whose Providence I adore, I submit with an entire Resignation to whatever happens to me, as being by the immediate direction of that Goodness, and for such wise and glorious Ends, as however I may not see through, will, at last, issue in good, even to me.

(Preface, VII)

The implied fatalism of Defoe, apparent in this latter quotation, is certainly at odds with Crusoe's aggressiveness, and is also inconsistent with Defoe's obvious curiosity about how things work and why they happen.<sup>27</sup> Elsewhere, H.F. dismisses fatalism, and shows how rational inquiry can be beneficial:

...he proceeded to tell me of the mischievous Consequences which attended the Presumption of the Turks and Mahometans in Asia...and how presuming upon their profess'd predestinating Notions, and of every Man's end being predetermin'd and unalterably beforehand decreed, they would go unconcerned into infect'd Places, and converse with infect'd Persons, by which Means they died at the Rate of Ten or Fifteen Thousand a Week, whereas the Europeans, or Christian Merchants, who kept themselves retir'd and reserv'd generally escap'd Contagion.

(JPY, pp. 11-12)

It seems as though there is a responsibility on the individual to make every possible effort to survive, even in the most hostile of circumstances, and even when this hostility is a divine judgment. It is important to note that Defoe (or at least H. F.) does not see the plague as arbitrary.

---

27. For a discussion of this point, and further examples of Defoe referring to Providence, see M.E. Novak, Defoe and the Nature of Man (Oxford, 1963), p.6.

It is seen as being divinely ordered, and also open to scientific analysis.

In Robinson Crusoe, the forces of chance and divine patterning are set in motion, and never fully differentiated.<sup>28</sup> Crusoe sets off on his life's journey in a state of some innocence.<sup>29</sup> He sees a Providential pattern in events, but is initially unimpressed by it. His awareness of his own 'sin' is presented clearly, but there is enough room for doubt about both his judgment and his behaviour to allow us to withhold commitment from such a view. We, as readers, are not obliged to accept whatever Crusoe tells us. Within his experience Crusoe detects a number of patterns which confirm the intrusions of Providence - dreams, predictions etc. One of the most interesting ones is the assertion that his experience is patterned by a number of recurrent dates:

I remember that there was a strange concurrence of Days, in the various Providences which befell me; and which, if I had been superstitiously inclin'd to observe Days as Fatal or Fortunate, I might have had Reason to have looked upon with a great deal of Curiosity.

First I had observed, that the same Day that I broke away from my Father and my Friends...the same Day afterwards I was taken by the Sallee Man of War, and made a Slave.

The same Day of the Year that I escaped out of the Wreck of that Ship in Yarmouth Rodes, that same Day-Year afterwards I made my escape from Sallee in the Boat.

The same Day of the Year I was born on (viz.) the 30th of September, that same Day, I had my life so miraculously saved 26 Years after, when I was cast on shore in this Island, so that my wicked Life, and my solitary Life begun both on a Day.

(RC, p. 133)

The belief in significant dates, and attendant supernatural control was widely held throughout the seventeenth century.<sup>30</sup> Importantly, Crusoe sees it as 'superstitious', and denies that he saw much in it.

28. See J.D.Crowley's Introduction to RC, pp. xxi - xxii.

29. I must take issue here with a recent critic who distinguishes between Crusoe and the picaresque on just this point. 'Preliminary ignorance of self is a prerequisite for autobiographical protagonists; unlike picaresques who begin with infinite cunning and thorough cynicism, they exist to show us the self growing and expanding in one way or another.' John J. Richetti, Defoe's Narratives: Situations and Structures (Oxford, 1975), p.30. I cannot agree with Richetti's view of the picaresque. In the previous chapter we saw how the picaresque did begin as an innocent, and that only by mistreatment did he acquire cynicism. To ignore the dramatic and violently induced change is to overlook one of the central incidents in any picaresque novel.

30. See Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic (1971, Penguin ed., Harmondsworth, 1973), pp. 735 - 745.

As evidence of a pattern in his varied life, it is unconvincing. Given that many of the other important days in his life (such as his conversion, his deliverance from the island, and his arrival back in England) have no evident concurrence, we can discount the claim to significance.<sup>31</sup>

Defoe is alerting us here to Crusoe's search for stability within his hazardous career. On many occasions, Defoe reminds us that the presence of jeopardy is a great stimulus to the belief in various superstitious practices. In A Journal of the Plague Year, H.F. talks at length about the sharp practices of those who exploited the public's desire for reassurance, and he tells us that with the approach of the plague 'the People ... were more addicted to Prophecies, and Astrological Conjurations...than ever they were before or since' (JPY, p. 21). We can see that in all of his fiction, Defoe shows us the protagonists responding to a major threat to their lives. In each case, the fear which arises leads to a hasty repentance, which is later distinguished from genuine penitence. The stress on fear is much greater in Defoe than in the picaresque novel, but it is still a fear of physical hardship rather than of damnation. Defoe's characters do not respond to jeopardy by putting their trust in God, but by practicality and a robust self-reliance. Only when the jeopardy is at its most extreme do religious thoughts begin to appear. We should not doubt their sincerity for this reason, but we should be alerted to the problems such 'repentances' involve.

There are many occasions throughout Crusoe where the narrator's religious views seem to be at odds with his behaviour. This arises from the way Providence is treated as yet another threat, alongside physical danger, for the most part of the book. When faced with this combination of threats, Crusoe relies on his own practicality, not on religious prostration. It is not enough to attribute this conflict to clumsiness on Defoe's part. There are certainly a number of inconsistencies in the book - the well-known ones of Crusoe filling his pockets on the ship, after swimming naked to it; or the awkward repetitions of events in the main narrative and in Crusoe's journal. These clumsinesses cannot be argued away, but Crusoe's apparent religious insensitivity is a different matter. It is displayed most obviously in his treatment of Xury, the slave who helps him escape from Bondage. Crusoe debates whether or not to throw his deliverer into the sea, but eventually decides against it. He promises Xury reward for his services - 'Xury, if you will be faithful to me I'll make you a great Man' (RC, p. 23). Crusoe's promise is not binding. When

---

31. It is worth noting a further inaccuracy here. Crusoe is 27 when he reaches the island, not 26.



the pair reach safety, Crusoe actually sells Xury for sixty pieces of eight - twenty less than he gets for the boat. Crusoe expresses some doubts about this transaction:

...not that I was not willing to let the Captain have him, but I was very loath to sell the poor Boy's Liberty, who had assisted me so faithfully in procuring my own. However, when I let him know my Reason, he own'd it to be just, and offer'd me this Medium, that He would give the Boy an Obligation to set him free in ten Years, if he turn'd Christian; upon this, and Xury saying he was willing to go to him, I let the Captain have him.

(RC, pp. 33 - 34)

The ease with which Crusoe translates an act of self-advancement into an act of largesse is somewhat disquieting. He seems to feel wholly confident of his right to sell Xury, and sees him only as one piece of cargo amongst others. He does later say 'I had done wrong in parting with my Boy Xury' (RC, p. 35), but this is regret rather than remorse. He needs Xury as a field hand.

In this episode, and in others, Defoe is presenting his material in a realistic way, in the sense defined earlier. The religious scruples of Crusoe become secondary to his economic triumph over adversity. Hence the environment in which he is portrayed is largely social and economic, rather than Providential. Elsewhere in Defoe, this economic sense predominates over religious scruple. Most strikingly, Captain Singleton ends with the narrator ostensibly penitent. However, his penitence does not prevent him from living off the spoils of his piracy. The same could be said of the ending of Moll Flanders. Providence may well intervene in each of these novels, but it does so only very rarely, at very special times. For the most part, Defoe's world is harsh, competitive, dangerous and materialistic.

A second episode which illustrates this triumph of prudence is the well-known one of Crusoe coming upon the drawer of money on the wrecked ship.<sup>32</sup> After a list of tools, the money is discovered and addressed:

I smil'd to myself at the Sight of  
this money, O Drug! Said I aloud,  
what art thou good for, Thou art  
not worth to me, no not the taking

---

32. This famous passage has been extensively and variously analysed. For a summary of the arguments, see Pat Rogers, Robinson Crusoe, pp. 80 - 82.

off of the ground, one of those  
Knives is worth all this Heap, I  
have no Manner of use for thee,  
e'en remain where thou art, and  
go to the bottom as a Creature  
whose Life is not worth saving.

(RC, p. 57)

Crusoe's rhetoric here is excessive. There is no reason why he should spurn so loftily a fortunate windfall of this kind. The money is not ill-gotten (as Singleton's is), and so there would be no moral taint in keeping it. Crusoe himself seems to become aware of this, as his next remark is 'However, upon second Thoughts, I took it away' (RC, p.57). Admittedly, at the point of the novel where this occurs, he is in greater need of tools than of gold, but there is still nothing to be gained by denouncing the gold.

In this episode, Crusoe's economic sense and his belief in Providence do not come in conflict. Providence is actually assisting him here, not warning or threatening him. We see here too that Crusoe's interpretation of events, and his comments on them need not always be accepted. We have been told earlier on that 'human Affairs are all subject to Changes and Disasters' (RC, p. 36). Interestingly, these words are not spoken by the devout Crusoe, but by the altruistic and financially adept Portugese captain who rescues Crusoe and Xury. Crusoe is only now coming to see the degree to which human affairs are prone to hazard, and he is beginning to explore the limits to which he can prevent disaster.

It is surely wrong to see this episode as ironic. If Crusoe had left home for economic reasons, and found money only when it was useless to him, then the episode would be ironic. However, as we saw, Crusoe left home because of his 'wandering Inclination', rather than from any attempt to achieve economic furtherance. In fact, his departure from home is economically imprudent, as he is aware. Consequently, there is nothing ironic in his discovery of the money, and nothing ironic in his decision to take it with him. Crusoe's prudence wins out over his excessive rhetoric. From the world we have seen, prudence is essential in the face of danger, and so Crusoe's decision to take the money seems quite consistent with his other behaviour, and quite proper.

Crusoe's adventures all reveal that he is in control of his own destiny only up to a point. The uncertainties of the book lie in the situation of that point. When he is first isolated on his island, he sees his survival as a religious deliverance:

I walk'd about the Shore, lifting  
 up my Hands, and my whole Being,  
 as I may say, wrapt up in the  
 Contemplation of my Deliverance,  
 making a Thousand Gestures and  
 Motions which I cannot describe,  
 reflecting upon all my Comrades  
 that were drown'd, and that there  
 should not be one Soul sav'd but  
 my self; for, as for them, I never  
 saw them afterwards, or any Sign  
 of them, except three of their Hats,  
 one Cap, and two Shoes that were  
 not Fellows.

(RC, p. 46)

Crusoe's use of the word 'Deliverance' alerts us to the religious sense of his survival. Yet this sense of him being spared by an act of mercy is difficult to reconcile with the deaths of the remainder of the crew. The stubbornly material reminder of their existence at the end of the passage leads us to ascribe Crusoe's own survival more to chance than to Providence.

At this point in the book, Crusoe's understanding of Providence is only sporadic. We can see this by contrasting his reactions to thunder with those of Singleton. Like the storm, thunder can be seen as a supernatural(non-realistic) intrusion into the material world. After Crusoe has settled on the island, he is troubled by a mighty blast:

At the same time it happen'd after  
 I had laid my Scheme for the setting  
 up my Tent and making the Cave, that  
 a Storm of Rain falling from a thick  
 dark Cloud, a sudden Flash of  
 Lightning happen'd, and after that  
 a great Clap of Thunder, as is  
 naturally the Effect of it; I  
 was not so much surpris'd with  
 the Lightning as I was with a  
 Thought which darted into my Mind  
 as swift as the Lightning itself:  
 O my Powder! My very Heart sunk  
 within me, when I thought, that at  
 one Blast all my Powder might be  
 oestroy'd, on which, not my Defence  
 only, but the providing my Food, as  
 I thought, depended...

(RC, p. 60)

Crusoe's concerns here are very obviously material. He is worried about his defence and his food supply, rather than about his spiritual condition. The thunder alerts him to the precariousness of his existence, but only in the physical or material sense.

We may profitably contrast this episode with an event in Captain Singleton. Singleton has become a notorious pirate, when he is troubled

by a blast from the skies:

...when on the sudden, from a dark Cloud which hover'd over our Heads, came a Flash, or rather Blast of Lightning, which was so terrible, and quiver'd so long among us, that not only I, but all our Men thought the Ship was on Fire...As the Blast from the Cloud was so very near us, It was but a few Moments after the Flash, that the terriblest Clap of Thunder followed that was ever heard by Mortals.

(CS, p. 194)

Singleton's sense of jeopardy after this event becomes more than just physical. The fear it brings about leads him to consider for the first time his spiritual condition:

...and this was the first Time that I can say I began to feel the Effects of that Horrour which I know since much more of, upon the just reflection of my former Life. I thought my self doom'd by Heaven to sink that Moment into eternal Destruction...

(CS, p. 195) 33

The reference to 'sinking' combines both the physical and the spiritual peril that Singleton detects. His likely damnation leads him to a kind of repentance, though it is possible to have reservations about its thoroughness. Crusoe sees no such direct warning in the lightning. He sees its danger as purely material, and even excludes all thoughts of after-life from his thinking:

I was nothing near so anxious about my own Danger, tho' had the Powder took Fire, I had never known who had hurt me.

(RC, p. 60)

Crusoe here avoids the religious rhetoric of the money episode, and shows no concern with his spiritual state. This would indicate that he is (as yet, at least) unaware of having sinned when leaving home, if that indeed was what he did. Also, it shows his overriding concern with physical danger. Such a concern does seem appropriate to his situation, for the world he inhabits is definitely hostile and dangerous.

---

33. For a similar incident where a blast of lightning converts an atheist, see Serious Reflections during the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe (1720), ed. G.A. Aitken in Romances and Narratives of Defoe (16 vols., London, 1895), III, 298.



One pattern which recurs throughout the book is Crusoe's acceptance of a non-providential or spiritual explanation for events when one is available. Always the supernatural is tested, and almost invariably dispelled in favour of a more verifiable solution. This can be seen in the episode of the green barley sprouting on the island. The incident has clear Biblical parallels, and Crusoe's first response is to thank Providence for a blessing:

It is impossible to express the Astonishment and Confusion of my Thoughts on this Occasion; I had hitherto acted upon no religious Foundation at all, indeed I had very few Notions of Religion in my Head, or had entertain'd any Sense of any Thing that had befallen me, otherwise than as a Chance, or, as we lightly say, what pleases God; without so much as enquiring into the End of Providence in these Things, or his Order in governing the World...

(RC, p. 78)

Crusoe sees the barley's appearance as miraculous, and takes it as confirmation of God's stewardship over him.

This initial impression may well be 'both arrogant and naive'.<sup>34</sup> The sudden change from the materialist castaway concerned only with survival, to the humble penitent is convincing neither psychologically nor theologically. However, the original view is subject to revision:

at last it occur'd to my Thoughts, that I had shook a Bag of Chickens Meat out in that Place, and then the Wonder began to cease; and I must confess, my religious Thankfulness to God's Providence began to abate too...

(RC, p. 78)

So Crusoe's vision of immanent Providence is routed by his practicality. His sense of inquiry lessens his confidence in Providence, and a more material or scientific view of the event wins over.

Despite Crusoe's equivocation, the incident remains open for discussion. Crusoe's final position is a return to the belief in Providence:

---

34. This incident is discussed by Hunter, The Reluctant Pilgrim, pp. 149 - 151; and by Starr, Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography, p. 194. See also Grief, op. cit., p. 565.

116

for it was really the Work of  
Providence as to me, that should  
order and appoint, that 10 or 12  
Grains of Corn should remain  
unspoil'd, (when the Rats had  
destroy'd all the rest,) as if  
it had been dropt from Heaven...  
(RC, p. 79)

Crusoe's initial naive belief in the direct intervention of God has been weakened to a more orthodox belief in God's mysterious but indirectly effective ways. In the words of G.A. Starr, Crusoe moves from seeing God as a 'first cause' to seeing him as a 'second cause'.<sup>35</sup> We may remember that this was the pattern of argument employed by H.F. to discuss the plague.<sup>36</sup> Crusoe's triumph over scepticism may be evidence for seeing the book as a justification of 'the wisdom of Providence' (RC, p. 1). However, it is important to notice that the eventual concept of Providence is arrived at by a process of trial and error. Crusoe's belief in Providence is being tested by the other alternative explanations available for any given event. Both here and later, Defoe is at pains to point out the partial inadequacy of Crusoe as a theologian. Crusoe's uncertainties about Providence also affect the way he tells his tale. He becomes interested in other events, which have no relation to the theme of Providence, and tells us of them in detail. Defoe's book becomes thematically uncertain when Crusoe resorts to explanations like that of the 'second cause'. It then becomes uncertain just how individual is Providence's stewardship, and also to what degree we are seeing Crusoe's own, rather inadequate, view of the dangerous world he inhabits.

Crusoe does try very hard, in retrospect, to justify the wisdom of Providence. His religious views are presented very emphatically, when they are stated, and there can be no reason to doubt them. When he falls ill on the island, and begins to fear his death, he sees his past life as a pattern of punishment for sin:

thro' all the Variety of Miseries  
that had to this Day befallen me,  
I never had so much as one Thought  
of it being the Hand of God, or  
that it was a just Punishment for  
my Sin; my rebellious Behaviour  
against my Father, or my present  
Sins which were great; or so much  
as a Punishment for the general  
Course of my wicked Life.  
(RC, p. 88)

---

35. Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography, p. 195.

36. See JPY, pp. 193 - 194.

Crusoe is coming to see his life in religious terms, but it is significant that when he does so, he is being retrospectively inaccurate. Consideration that his treatment was punishment for sin had previously taken place, during the storm on his very first voyage. His new view of punishment is much more firmly held, but its lapse of memory is striking.

When Crusoe does decide to take up religion, he makes use of a convention which depends on God's control over apparent randomness. The random selection of a Biblical passage was a Puritan convention designed to surrender the individual will to Providential guidance.<sup>37</sup> Crusoe's consequent conversion is expressed soberly, and that may be why so many writers have underestimated it. For instance, one biographer refers to Crusoe's religious remarks as 'boggy stretches of moralising'.<sup>38</sup> Later, Ian Watt refers to 'the relative impotence of religion in Defoe's novels'.<sup>39</sup> Yet when we actually look at Crusoe's words, we can see that his religious conversion is the most important of all the events that take place on the island.

In planning his daily routine, Crusoe puts his priorities as follows:

First, My Duty to God, and the Reading of the Scriptures, which I constantly set apart some time for thrice every Day. Secondly, The going Abroad with my Gun for Food, which generally took me up three Hours in every Morning, when it did not Rain. Thirdly, The ordering, curing, preserving, and cooking what I had kill'd or catch'd for my supply...

(RC, p. 114)

- 
- 37. See Hunter, The Reluctant Pilgrim, pp. 158-160; and Starr, Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography, pp. 103 - 106. Just such a random selection of text occurs in A Journal of the Plague Year, which leads the narrator to trust to God's help and stay in London. See JPY pp. 12-13.
  - 38. James Sutherland, Defoe (London, 1937), p. 239.
  - 39. The Rise of the Novel, p. 84. 'Though a religious element enters all his principal sources for Robinson Crusoe, he goes much beyond them.' A.W. Secord, Studies in the Narrative Method of Defoe (Illinois, 1924), p. 239.

It is striking just how important he sees his religion as being. By giving the first place in this list to religion, Crusoe emphasises the overpowering significance of his relationship with God.

However, if this order of priority is striking, then it is much more striking just how little we get to see of Crusoe's religion in his tale. Much more time is spent telling us of the second and third activities, which seem the more fruitful and profitable ways to behave. Crusoe keeps trying hard to find religious significance in his treatment - as with the search for a concurrence of days mentioned earlier. For the reader, this search seems to be much more of an act of faith than an empirically justified endeavour. Crusoe talks of resigning himself wholly to God's will - 'My Mind being entirely composed by resigning to the Will of God, and throwing my self wholly upon the Disposal of his Providence' (RC, p. 135). But his activities as recounted do not fit easily with this description. Crusoe is far too active and assertive a character to be described as wholly resigned to his fate. His practicality attempts to overcome the hardship of his isolation, not to accept it.

It is here that we can begin to see the relationship between Robinson Crusoe and the picaresque novel. In the picaresque, the narrator realises that his social world is wholly materialistic and hostile to him, and he sets out single-mindedly to combat his assailants. We saw earlier how Crusoe's world was volatile and certainly very hazardous. Though he is never treated maliciously, the elements and the physical dangers he undergoes seem designed to rob him of all comfort and stability. However, Crusoe's response to this hardship is not singleminded self-preservation. He does attempt, as far as he can, to alleviate his sufferings, but he also tries to detect within these sufferings some divine planning. Robinson Crusoe, then, becomes a novel set in the hostile world of the picaresque, but a novel which introduces into that world the search for divine order.

One recent critic describes Crusoe's religion as 'Crusoe's need for that God as something which validates his solitary being and provides an analogue for his order'.<sup>40</sup> Though the meaning of the 'analogue' here is far from clear, there is certainly something to be said for this reading. Crusoe goes through his adventures seeking a God, and whether he finds one or not is very much open to question. Crusoe himself never doubts the

---

40. John J. Richetti, Defoe's Narratives, p. 43.

119  
reality of Providence after his conversion, but his world remains stubbornly material despite his efforts. The stumbling-block for all the studies of the book which see it as a conventional story of conversion is that Crusoe himself seems to remain the same character before and after his conversion. As one writer puts it, 'A possible shortcoming in these theologically oriented studies is....their failure to account adequately if at all for the abundant textual evidence that Crusoe's conversion fails to effect sweeping changes in his character and values'.<sup>41</sup> Even Crusoe himself seems to slip up now and then, and to forget his own faith - '... by meer Accident (I would say, if I did not see abundant Reason to ascribe all such Things now to Providence)' (RC, p. 176).

The book now begins to be thematically uncertain. It is searching for spiritual significance in a world which remains obstinately material. When Crusoe comes upon the footprint on the shore, his concerns are noticeably more physical than spiritual:

Then terrible Thoughts rack'd my  
Imagination about their having found  
my Boat, and that there were People  
here; and that if so, I should  
certainly have them come again in  
greater Numbers and devour me; and  
that if it should happen so that  
they should not find me, yet they  
would find my Enclosure, destroy  
all my Corn, carry away all my Flock of tame  
Goats, and I should perish at last  
for meer Want.

(RC, p. 155)

The destruction he fears most is physical, the loss of the fruits of his labours. He does not mention the spiritual danger he might be in, but nor does his language express any confidence that his faith will at least ensure some comfort in the afterlife. It is true that he later reviews this initial reaction:

Such is the uneven State of human  
Life:...I consider'd that this was  
the Station of Life the infinitely  
wise and good Providence of God had  
determin'd for me, that as I could not  
foresee what the end of Divine Wisdom  
might be in all this, so I was not  
to dispute his Sovereignty...

(RC, pp. 156 - 7)

Crusoe never goes as far as to dispute God's sovereignty,

---

41. E. Anthony James, Daniel Defoe's Many Voices (Amsterdam, 1972), p. 166n.



but he often seems to forget about it.

Crusoe's meditations are beginning to reveal the conflict between a realistic presentation of events and a more theologically influenced one. He immediately sees events in terms of their danger to him, and his religious meditations are always secondary in importance, if not in strict chronology. For an example of this, think of the episode concerning the goat in the cave. Crusoe comes across a cave on his island, and looking in, 'saw two broad shining Eyes of some Creature, whether Devil or Man I knew not, which twinkled like two Stars' (RC, p. 177). The possibility that the figure is the Devil is extended, and makes Crusoe very much afraid. He reassures himself with the recollection 'that the Power and Presence of God was every where, and was able to protect me' (RC, pp. 177 - 8). When he discovers that the object of his fear is only an old dying goat, Crusoe passes no comment. The episode is not turned to any moral end, but remains as a case where the Devil has been rather gratuitously introduced and discarded. As Pierre Macherey puts it:

The exorcism does not even necessarily pass through the moment of interpretation: the 'story' itself puts the devil to flight; it was a cannibal, an old goat ... and Providence is quickly forgotten. 42

The ease with which Providence is forgotten is equally seen when Crusoe has a ghostly visitation from a voice crying 'Poor Robin Crusoe, Where are you? Where have you been? How come you here?' (RC, p. 143).

Once Crusoe realises that this is only the voice of his parrot, he quickly forgets the portentousness of the message. In neither of these episodes, then, is there any sustained presentation of Providence. The religious interpretation of events is ignored in favour of a realistic presentation of facts.

It is important to note that neither of these occasions is put to ironic use. There is no evidence to suggest that Defoe wishes us to take a meaning beyond the text. We are told of Crusoe's fears and reassurances, and not invited to speculate upon his limitations. These limitations are simply part of the fabric of the novel, not its theme. The book remains uneasily placed in its emphasis upon both Providence and fact, but in Crusoe, unlike Moll to a certain extent and Roxana extensively,

the narrator's inadequate explanations are not a source of irony.

The conflict between spirituality and practicality is seen prominently in the appearance of the cannibals and Friday. Interestingly, when Crusoe first comes across the footprint, he takes it as evidence of the Devil's presence. Yet once he has thought more carefully about the evidence, he takes it to be the work of 'some more dangerous Creature' (RC, p. 155). It is surely surprising to see Crusoe taking a physical threat to his life as more dangerous than a spiritual threat, if his conversion is thought to be thorough. Nonetheless, he is still thinking of his experience in Providential terms, which he expresses in a later lengthy discussion (RC, pp. 156 - 7). Again, though, his response to jeopardy is as much practical as spiritual, just as are H.F.'s in A Journal of the Plague Year or Defoe's own in Due Preparation for the Plague (1722). Crusoe's response to danger is both religious - a review of his spiritual position - and practical - an improvement in his fortifications. It can be argued that all Defoe's narrators respond to danger in this two-fold way, but we should be wary of using the 'duality' to dismiss their religious convictions.<sup>43</sup>

Crusoe seems to see no conflict between his apparent religious prostration and his aggressive practicality. The dichotomy is in fact recurrent throughout Defoe's work, and is first expressed as early as 1697:

MAN is the worst of all God's Creatures  
to shift for himself; no other Animal  
is ever starv'd to Death; Nature without  
has provid'd them both Food and Cloaths;  
and Nature within has plac'd an Instinct  
that never fails to direct them to  
proper means for a supply; but Man must  
either Work or Starve, Slave or Dye;  
he has indeed Reason given him to  
direct him, and few who follow the  
Dictates of that Reason come to such  
unhappy Exigencies; but when by the  
Errors of a Man's Youth he has reduc'd  
himself to such a Degree of Distress,  
as to be absolutely without three  
Things, Money, Friends, and Health,  
he dies in a Ditch, or in some worse  
Place, an Hospital. 44

---

43. See the discussion of this point in James, Daniel Defoe's Many Voices, pp. 143 - 154.

44. Daniel Defoe, An Essay Upon Projects (1697), in Selected Poetry and Prose of Daniel Defoe (New York, 1968), p. 7.

It is interesting here that later privations are the result of 'Errors' rather than sin, and that these privations can be combated by the use of reason rather than prayer. Defoe's view here seems to be that there may well be a divine Providence, but for the most part man is left alone, and must strive to survive by his own efforts. It is also worth noticing that the privations described relate to each of Defoe's narrators, and that in each novel he examines the effects of 'the Errors of....Youth'.

Defoe's interest in the response to privation will be seen again in Moll Flanders and Roxana, but for the moment let us concentrate on his treatment of friendship in Crusoe. Friday's arrival on the island is heralded by a dream prognostication, which seems to give it some religious or Providential significance (RC, p. 198). The dream proves to be accurate, and Crusoe is given the opportunity to release Friday from the cannibal's' captivity without seriously endangering himself, though with some loss of lives. What is most interesting about the introduction of Friday is that, despite Crusoe's frequent outcries about the dearth of companionship on his island, he never treats Friday as a genuine companion. It has been argued that Crusoe is perfectly entitled to treat Friday as a slave.<sup>45</sup> However, it is still striking that even the repentant Crusoe thinks more in terms of ruling than of serving. Earlier in the book, he has talked light-heartedly of his 'subjects':

there was my Majesty, the Prince and Lord of the whole Island; I had the Lives of all my Subjects at my absolute Command. I would hang, draw, give Liberty, and take it away, and no Rebels among all my Subjects.

(RC, p. 148)

The levity of this is that Crusoe's 'subjects' are a parrot, a dog and two cats.

It could be argued that Crusoe is one of Defoe's many publications which deal with social order, and that Crusoe's sovereignty reflects Defoe's anti-Jacobitism. However, even if this were true, it does not help us to understand Crusoe's subjection of Friday. Defoe, as we know, published many pieces on the proper and dignified treatment of servants. Crusoe's treatment of Friday follows Defoe's recommendations broadly, but other elements are also introduced. First, Friday presents himself as a willing slave:

---

45. 'Friday is Crusoe's slave because Crusoe has spared his life.' M.E. Novak, Defoe and the Nature of Man, p. 52.

123

At last he lays his Head flat upon  
the Ground, close to my Foot, and  
sets my other Foot upon his Head,  
as he had done before; and after this,  
made all the Signs to me of  
Subjection, Servitude, and Submission  
imaginable, to let me know, how he  
would serve me as long as he liv'd.

(RC, p. 206)

Crusoe does not protest about this offered subjection, and does not ask Friday for companionship. Rather he accepts the offer, and Friday enters into a kind of willing bondage, much like that of Xury earlier. We can see here the explicit reversal of the picaresque master/servant roles, but at this point no ironies are readily detectable.

Crusoe's first act towards Friday is the most explicit of all acts of ownership, that of naming. Crusoe does not ask Friday his name, he confers a name upon him:

in a little Time I began to speak to  
him, and teach him to speak to me;  
and first, I made him know his Name  
should be Friday, which was the Day  
I sav'd his Life; I call'd him so  
for the Memory of the Time; I likewise  
taught him to say Master, and then  
let him know, that was to be my Name.

(RC, p. 206) 46

At no point does Crusoe consider anything odd about the power he holds over Friday. Even when he likens his servant to a son (RC, p. 209), he forgets that a son can be allowed to run off, even to sea if he wishes. The relationship is never one of equals, but one of kindly master and childlike servant.

Crusoe's treatment of Friday is certainly kind and thoughtful, but is such kindness seen by Defoe as wholly disinterested and altruistic? In his non-fictional tracts about the treatment of servants, Defoe does advocate kindness. However, he recommends it not out of generosity of spirit, but because it is the most efficient economic way to behave - i.e. if you treat servants well, they will work harder for you. This mercantile view of charity is discussed in Roxana, as we shall see, and figures interestingly in Colonel Jack. When Jack is in charge of a plantation, he is merciful towards a slave called Mouchat, who becomes devoted to him. When faced with a doubting plantation-owner, Jack defends his behaviour:

---

46. Crusoe's act of naming is discussed by Hans W. Hausermann, 'Aspects of Life and Thought in Robinson Crusoe,' RES XI (1935), 449.

124

It may be true, Sir, that there may be found here and there a Negro of a senceless, stupid, sordid Disposition; perfectly untractable, undocile, and incapable of due Impressions ... But, Sir, if such a Refractory, undocible Fellow comes in our Way, he must be dealt with, first, by the smooth Ways, to try him; then by the violent Ways to break his Temper ... and if this was done, I doubt not, you should have all your Plantation carried on, and your Work done, and not a Negro or a Servant upon it, but what would not only Work for you, but even Die for you ...

(CJ, pp. 145 - 6)

Jack's argument is designed to increase productivity, for which purpose he sees gentleness as more effective with strength, in the vast majority of cases. In Colonel Jack, such sentiments arouse no surprise, for Jack is not pretending to be newly converted. In Crusoe, the narrator's behaviour is puzzling because it is so similar to his treatment of Xury, which was before his conversion.

The puzzle arises from this thematic confusion. The narrative is trying to show Crusoe's adeptness at survival in a hostile environment, while at the same time cataloguing his progress towards redemption. Crusoe's own understanding of his experience seems muddled, since he so often forgets about his penitence, and emphasises much more his struggles to survive. The uneasy alliance between prostration and practicality leads to many problems like the treatment of Friday, and yet it seems wrong to see this conflict as being the underlying ironic theme of the book.

Only very rarely can we detect any playfulness on Defoe's part, where he points out forcibly Crusoe's limitations. Crusoe is frequently presented as robust and rather ill- feeling. For instance, we can detect his relish in the score-card he gives for his skirmish with the cannibals:

3 Kill'd at our First Shot from the Tree.  
2 Kill'd at the next Shot.  
2 Kill'd by Friday in the Boat.  
2 Kill'd by Ditto, of those at first wounded.  
1 Kill'd by Ditto, in the Wood.  
3 Kill'd by the Spaniard.  
4 Kill'd, being found dropp'd here and there ...  
4 Escap'd in the Boat ...

21 In all.

(RC, p. 237)



128

This callous recital of seventeen deaths is presented without any missionary zeal. It is simply a fact of Crusoe's struggles to survive, which overrule his religious prostrations. We can see his imperceptiveness not only on these occasions, but also in his omissions. It is striking, for example, that Friday's joyous reunion with his father arouses no thoughts of family in Crusoe (RC, p. 238). Crusoe's attitude towards the natives seems to be that they are something rather less than fellow human beings. Parallel instances can be found in Captain Singleton, when the Captain and his men attack some natives, killing thirty-seven of them, including three women. The only regret the Captain expresses is that 'there was no great Spoil to be got' (CS, p. 77).<sup>47</sup> It is such episodes which lead one commentator to say that Defoe had 'a genuine sympathy with the poor and the oppressed - of his own race, at any rate'.<sup>48</sup>

Though this is not ironic, it is also not the ruthless self-assertion of the picaro. The natives are not being seen as dupes or fools, to be tricked and taken advantage of, in the hero's pursuit of stability. Rather, they have a different status from the other individuals within the books, in that it is permissible, it seems, to treat them freely. Only on one major occasion does Defoe deliberately point out the inadequacy of Crusoe's position. As a convert, Crusoe feels compelled to explain Christian ethics to his servant. However, his attempts to explain are clumsy and confused and Friday's puzzled questions leave Crusoe lost for answers. Apart from one swipe at the 'Priestcraft' involved in Friday's own religion, Crusoe does not seem to understand the complexity of either his own religion or of Friday's. When Friday asks why the all-powerful God does not simply wipe out the Devil for once and for all, Crusoe is unable to explain.

This incident is not treated with the savage irony of, say, Lemuel Gulliver's unwitting revelations to the King of Brobdingnag. However, it does reveal a definite, carefully indicated degree of incompetence in Crusoe's religious understanding. At no other point does Defoe point out any such ironic undercutting of his narrator's position.

---

47. Elsewhere in Singleton, the Captain and his crew perform outrages like setting fire to some Indians in a tree. It is worth noting too that when the crew enslave an African prince, they teach him first to say 'Yes, Sir' (CS, p. 60).

48. David Skilton, The English Novel : Defoe to the Victorians (London, 1977), p. 16.

The treatment of Crusoe's religion in Bunuel's film, as mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, is only this once justified by the original text. Crusoe's behaviour after his conversion remains as robust and practical as ever.<sup>49</sup> However, Defoe avoids comment on this, and we are only led to see the conflict between prudence and subservience as an unresolved tension.

From this point onwards, the book seems to lose interest in Crusoe's religion, and concentrates instead on his adventures. The only significant references to religion in the latter parts of the book are Crusoe's remarks about allowing 'Liberty of Conscience' to his three subjects who are Protestant, Papist and Cannibal (RC, p. 241). In fact, he does not allow them total freedom, being so appalled by cannibalism that he refuses to countenance it. The increased concern with survival is made obvious when Crusoe leaves his island, and offers the stranded mutineers his advice. He presents the island to them as hostile and dangerous, a place to be conquered by physical effort. He provides much practical advice - how to manage goats, how to make cheese and bread, how to fortify a dwelling-place. However, he offers them no spiritual guidance whatsoever. He does not recommend repentance to them, and fails to mention God's Providence. His views now seem to have moved from the religious understanding offered earlier to a renewed concern with life as a perpetual combat against hardship, rather than sin or evil or the Devil himself.

It is not necessary to suggest that Crusoe himself becomes less penitent as the book goes on, or that he comes to forget his penitence. Any attempt to do so would turn the book into a psychological study of the narrator, and it is clearly more static and symbolic than that, not to mention more jumbled. More inconsistencies could be pointed out, both in plotting and in characterisation,<sup>50</sup> and it is significant that Defoe's most characteristic stylistic device should be his approximating phrases.<sup>51</sup> These last indicate a degree of uncertainty in the presentation of the material, which may be germane to the uncertainty of theme. The fact Crusoe cannot tell us anything with complete precision indicates that his world is unfixed and uncertain. It is not the hierarchical or ordered

49. In Farther Adventures, Crusoe actually blows up a Tartar idol, Cham-Chi-Tonga, and further displays his imperceptiveness by taking no action against his crew after they have sacked a town in Madagascar (FA, pp. 183-8, 96-102).

50. See James, Daniel Defoe's Many Voices, pp. 27, 36-7, 192n, 231.

51. See Arthur Sherbo, Studies in the Eighteenth Century Novel (Michigan, 1969), pp. 155-165; G.A. Starr, 'Defoe's Prose Style: 1. The Language of Interpretation,' MP LXXI (1974), 277-294; Pat Rogers, Robinson Crusoe, pp. 119-125.

world of the spiritual biography, wholly, but a material and fluctuating world, as hostile as that of the picaro.

After Crusoe has left his island, the book closes rather hurriedly. He finds out about his family, who are mostly dead, and the survivors have forgotten about him, giving another indication of the lack of fixity in family life. He discovers too that his money has been working for him in his isolation, and that he is now a fairly wealthy man. All this is carried on briskly, without any discussion of the miraculous nature of Crusoe's deliverance, or of his desire to continue his religious life. The reason for such brevity cannot simply be the desire to get things finished as quickly as possible, for there is a lengthy, irrelevant episode when Friday is chased up a tree by a bear. It seems as though the book's ending is entirely devoid of religious sentiment, with only one partial exception. - 'I had some little Scruple in my Mind about Religion' (RC, p. 287). Crusoe's disquiet is aroused by his recollection that he called himself a Papist all the while he was in Brasil, and now wishes he had not, since 'it might not be the best Religion to die with' (RC, p. 287). Even Religion, then becomes taken over by prudence and survival. The mention of the after-life is couched in terms which are not fully pious or humble, but self-interested and material.

Crusoe's religious conviction is now revealed to be weaker, if we are to see the book as a consistent whole. He describes his scruples in more detail:

As I had entertain'd some Doubts  
about the Roman Religion, even while  
I was abroad, especially in my State  
of Solitude; so I knew there was no  
going to the Brasils for me... unless  
I resolv'd to embrace the Roman  
Catholick Religion, without any  
Reserve; unless on the other Hand,  
I resolv'd to be a Sacrifice to my  
Principles, to be a Martyr for Religion,  
and die in the Inquisition; so I  
resolved to stay at Home ...

(RC, p. 304)

Crusoe is clearly not the stuff of which martyrs are made. His previous fervent desire to convert to Christianity has now become softened to a kind of 'live and let live' tolerance. Even if we see behind this tolerance the figure of Defoe the Dissenter seeking greater religious toleration the episode still shows a great weakening of Crusoe's fervour.

As Crusoe comes to sum<sup>up</sup> his experiences, he stresses their variety rather more than any hidden principle of organisation

within them. His most direct summary offers no religious sentiments at all:

thus I have given the first Part  
of a Life of Fortune and Adventure,  
A Life of Providence's Checquer-  
Work, and of a Variety which the  
World will seldom be able to shew  
the like of... (RC, p. 304)

The idea of 'Providence's Checquer-Work' is a much less committed approach to God than that expressed in the conversion episode. Crusoe seems to have abandoned the idea of 'second causes' in favour of a less strict view of natural phenomena. He now sees them as simply a 'variety', not as a pattern. The book ends indeterminately. Crusoe marries 'not either to my Disadvantage or Dissatisfaction' (RC, p. 303), has three children, and becomes a widower all in less than one sentence. All this detail is simply the preamble to another voyage, a return to the island to inspect progress. The concluding sentences form a kind of advertisement for the Farther Adventures, which Defoe published the following year.

The book then neither opens nor closes in stability. Crusoe seems to have ceased to see his life as a pattern, and offers no didactic summary of it. No longer does he think in terms of sin and the hard road to salvation, and he certainly does not see his new comfortable status as a reward for his repentance. When he expands on these final pages at the opening of Farther Adventures, he thinks of himself not as subservient to God, but as the victim of a kind of Ruling Passion. He refers to 'the strong inclination I had to go abroad again, which hung about me like a chronical Distemper' (FA, p. 112). Yet he does see some guiding Providential hand at work, expressed once again as a threat - 'But in the Middle of all this Felicity, one Blow from unforeseen Providence unhing'd me at once' (FA, p. 116). The event referred to is the death of his wife, which is passed over so casually at the end of Crusoe. There are a number of such references to Providence in the Farther Adventures,<sup>52</sup> but these never amount to a fully-realised principle of organisation. Once or twice, we see a more serious commitment to Providence, as when Will Atkins says, 'Whenever we come to look back upon our Lives, the Sins against our indulgent Parents are certainly the first that touch us' (FA, III, 44), and Crusoe sees this as true of his own case. Yet these are no more than asides in a rambling and discursive narrative. The main direction of this volume is towards finance and adventure. It is significant that the book ends with Crusoe telling us just how much he earned

---

52. See FA, II, 150, 160, 166, 221; III, 4, 13, 18, 25, 34, 38, 40, 82, 142.



129

from these escapades - £3475/17/3d. Only in the final part, the Serious Reflections, do we get a sustained analysis of Providence, and that is a collection of essays, not a pseudo-autobiography told by a forgetful narrator.

What then is gained by looking at Robinson Crusoe in the contexts of realism and the picaresque novel? The fundamental point has been to restore to proper emphasis the danger and jeopardy of Crusoe's world. One consequence of the rediscovery of the spiritual elements of the book has been to obscure partially the disorganised and hectic world through which the narrator moves. Crusoe's world is full of threats, fraught with danger, and obviously both mobile and unstable. Though there clearly is a pervasive spiritual motif, that motif exists alongside other motifs of material survival. In as much as we stress the materialist conception of the world, we are stressing the novel's relationship with the picaresque novel. Like the picaresque, Crusoe reveals the dangers incumbent in the solitary life. Unlike, the picaresque, Crusoe indicates that life is not necessarily competitive and solitary, but that the narrator's solitude is a result of his inclinations.

The book then offers a view of life which is both significantly similar to and significantly different from the picaresque. The similarities lie in the stress on the haphazard and dangerous nature of life. This is seen in Crusoe's instability and in the frequent reversals which disrupt his search for comfort. The differences from the picaresque lie essentially in Crusoe's search for pattern, which is partially successful. It can be seen then that the crucial critical question remains the question of Crusoe's religious life. Is it to be taken seriously? Or is it to be dismissed as lip-service? Neither of these answers seems satisfactory. Crusoe's religious sense is on occasions seen to be limited - we need not agree with his view of leaving home as sinful; his rhetoric on finding the money is excessive; he cannot explain his religion to Friday. But for all that, his search remains serious and consistent. Crusoe's religious beliefs are only very rarely made ironic, and yet they never seem to affect his behaviour fully. The problem seems to be that Defoe has not fully incorporated the book's inconsistencies within the personality of Crusoe himself.

In a work of extended irony, like Gulliver's Travels, the confusions of emphasis and limitations of viewpoint are incorporated within the personality of the narrator. That is to say, the inconsistencies of Gulliver's views are part of the book's theme, which is being more



systematically explored by Swift. So too the disorganised narration of the hack author in A Tale of a Tub, with its inability to stick to the point, is being used by Swift to show a coherent view of the inadequacy of that narrator. At no point in Crusoe does Defoe make us aware of any such underlying organisation. Crusoe's failings as narrator are simply failings, and they cannot be rationalised as underlying successes for Defoe.

In the literature of discovery where the narrator comes to see the limitations of his earlier viewpoint, one view of life prevails over another. In the picaresque novel, this is expressed by the banishing of innocence, and the dominance of the materialist view. Again, no such consistent control can be detected in Crusoe. The narrator seems to change his mind about his experience (as in the barley episode) but no certain view of his experience is evolved. The two opposing views of Providential control or chance are never fully resolved, and the lack of resolution reveals an uncertainty in the thematic control of the whole book. The uncertainties are best seen as Crusoe's rather than as Defoe's, but there is no evidence to suggest a deeper level of certainty than the book displays. The picaresque novel, despite its pessimism about the chances of success in the world, was optimistic that it could be certain how the world would behave. The consistently materialist view makes instability inevitable, but, however paradoxical it sounds, that inevitability provides the narrators with a consistent and clear view of the world. Crusoe has no such clarity, and that is its main difference from the picaresque. Into the picaresque world of danger and instability it has introduced the notion of Providence, but that notion has not been made fully dominant.

The value of seeing Crusoe in terms of the picaresque is that we are allowed to emphasise its revelation of instability, and also to see how Crusoe tries to find alternatives to instability. In Defoe's later fiction, the view of instability changes. Moll eventually finds comfort and security after a life at least as unstable as Crusoe's. However, Defoe uses his central character to get us to adopt a different interpretation of that stability from the interpretation offered by Moll herself. The book's inconsistencies then become (largely) Moll's own inconsistencies, and the book becomes both more unified and more ironic. In Roxana, the heroine finds a recurrent pattern in her existence, but that pattern becomes much more a source of jeopardy than of comfort. The book becomes thematically organised by the triumph of one view of the world over another, and ends in abject pessimism. Without either of these inconsistencies, Crusoe remains interesting for its lack of cohesion. By showing

the confusions of Crusoe, Defoe may not have presented us with a fully organised novel, but he has provided us with a startling and stimulating description of these confusions.

It will have been noticed that the discussion of Crusoe has become impregnated with the imagery of strife and conflict. There has been talk of Crusoe 'combatting' his solitude; of the 'triumph' of one view over another; of the 'strife' within Crusoe's descriptions of his experiences. Such imagery is a consequence of the book's radical uncertainty and instability. By seeing the book in terms of the picaresque, we see more precisely the areas of uncertainty within the book. Unlike the picaresque, Crusoe does not reveal the world to be uniformly competitive and hostile. However, Crusoe does still dramatise a state of continual conflict. It is not the conflict between the main protagonist and the world; it is the conflict between the protagonist's various views of the world. The world in Crusoe is sometimes seen as hostile, and at other times seen as reassuringly patterned. Crusoe's own uncertainties about the status of Providence, and about the degree of his own control, are the features of the book which this investigation has made most obvious. Also, the comparison with the picaresque helps us see the jeopardy of Crusoe's position, which will be further explored in Moll and Roxana.

## CHAPTER FIVE: MOLL FLANDERS AND COMFORT

In the preceding chapter, it became apparent that the term 'picaresque' was of only very limited use in discussion of Robinson Crusoe, but that 'realism' was more helpful. With Moll Flanders, we will see that both terms have been frequently used, usually as terms of praise, and yet little investigation has taken place into the full adequacy of these as part of a critical apparatus. In the studies of the picaresque by Parker, Alter and Whitbourn, which were discussed in Chapter Three, Moll Flanders is treated as a picaresque novel, but there seem to be issues left unraised, which will be explored in this chapter.

Recently, historians like Christopher Hill, Keith Thomas, E.P. Thompson, Robert W. Malcolmson and Michel Foucault have revived interest in the various sub-cultures of late seventeenth-century and early eighteenth-century life.<sup>1</sup> The importance of their work has not only been to lessen the hold of the view which sees the eighteenth century as an age of elegance or ease, but also to allow a new way of talking about the 'low' life of the period. In much earlier scholarship, there was a tacit assumption that low life was criminal life, and that the literature of low life was the literature of crime. Certainly, a great deal of crime literature does exist in the seventeenth century, in the form of the cony-catching pamphlets and the sub-plots of Jacobean drama. However, it is important to notice that there is a great difference between this type of literature and the picaresque novel.

The picaresque was presented as a revelation that all low life was, for the most pressing reasons, criminal. It aimed to show the reader that roguery was the best way of attaining comfort and stability in a hostile world. However, the cony-catching pamphlets had a rather different aim. They were presented as a warning to the non-criminal members of the lower classes, helping them to identify tricksters and so avoid deception. Robert Greene's A Notable Discovery of Cozenage (1951) is addressed to 'Young Gentlemen, Marchants, Apprentices, Farmers, and plain Countrey-men', and offers to help and advise them:

my younger yeeres had uncertaine  
thoughtes, but now my ripe daies  
calls on to repentant deedes...The  
odde mad-caps I have been mate too,  
not as a companion, but as a spie

---

1. See the entries in the Bibliography under these names.

to have an insight into their  
 knaveries, that seeing their trainees  
 I might eschew their snares: those  
 mad fellows I learned at last to  
 loath, by their owne graceless  
 villenies, and what I saw in them  
 to their confusion, I can forewarne  
 in others to my countreies commodity. 2

Unlike the picaresque, then, the cony-catching pamphlet in no sense recommends the criminal life. Though it is true that Greene often forgets this moralistic aim and becomes intoxicated by his material, he tries hard in the prefaces to disassociate himself from the activities he relates.

If there are different kinds of criminal literature, how do we classify Moll Flanders? The argument of this chapter will be that it is improper to call Moll picaresque, since her criminal behaviour is only a contingent feature of her life, not a necessary feature. She is faced, as the picaro is, with a hostile and estranging world. However, the world as she sees it is not wholly material, and she does not recommend her reaction to it as the most appropriate one. In the picaresque, deception and fraud are part of the protagonist's armoury; in Moll, they are part of the threat to her.

Any response to the book must depend upon the attitude the reader adopts to the narrator, and it is this issue which has dominated critical discussion. The possibility of irony in Crusoe was discussed earlier, and in the case of Moll it has become the central critical question. In The Rise of the Novel, Ian Watt soundly dismissed any consistent view - 'Moll Flanders is undoubtedly an ironic object, but it is not a work of irony'.<sup>3</sup> Against this view, we could put the remarks of Dorothy Van Ghent, who found in Moll 'a complex system of ironies or counterstresses', which create 'a coherent and significant work of art'.<sup>4</sup> We can see here the issues raised by Crusoe once again appearing. The controversy centres round Defoe's degree of control over his material. Does he, as Watt claimed, reveal to us the contradictions within the book only unwittingly? Or does he, as Van Ghent claimed, choose to reveal these contradictions as the central theme of his book? Much work has been done since these early studies attempting to find ways out of the dilemma, and we may refer to the articles as necessary. For the moment, let us simply note the

---

2. Robert Greene, A Notable Discovery of Coosnage (1591), ed. G.B. Harrison (London, 1923), pp. 7-8.

3. The Rise of the Novel, p. 135. See also Watt's 'The Recent Critical Fortunes of Moll Flanders', Eighteenth Century Studies, I (1967), 109-126.

4. Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel: Form and Function (New York, 1953), p. 36.

unhelpfulness of much of the discussion. In dealing with Crusoe, it became apparent that neither the idea of Providence nor the idea of chance was alone adequate to describe the book's progress. Defoe's invention was obviously spasmodic, and his themes never fully carried out. Similarly, no single scheme could fully describe Moll. By pointing out the book's similarity to and differences from the picaresque, we may get to see its essential form. However, if we take into account the work of the newer historians, we should not be surprised if the book tries to express views which are retrospectively seen as either confused or contradictory. In a society which embraces as many different views of the world as Defoe's did, we can only expect extended fiction to be lacking in thematic singleness of mind. For this reason too we shall have to be very wary with the word 'realism'.

Moll Flanders opens with Defoe again posing as an editor, giving us a summary of his book. The preface, as it is presented, is as inadequate and uninformative as the prefaces of Crusoe and the other novels. We were told that Crusoe was 'a just History of Fact' (RC, p.1), which was obviously not the case, and we were further told that the story would 'justify and honour the wisdom of Providence in all the Variety of our Circumstances' (RC, p. 1). In the last chapter, we saw that the book was not as singleminded as this. In the preface, Defoe seems to be presenting his material as though it were consistently moral and pious, when in fact such religious interest is never fully central. He seems to admit the inadequacy of his prefaces in the introduction to Colonel Jack;

this work needs a Preface less than any that ever went before it; the pleasant and delightful Part speaks for itself; the useful and instructive Part is so large, and capable of so many Improvements, that it would employ a Book, large as it self, to make Improvements suitable to the vast Variety of the Subject.

(CJ, p. 1)

Defoe is suggesting here that some other book might have been written as long and as interesting as the existent Colonel Jack, emphasising much more the moral theme. However, he emphasises that he did not, in fact, write that book. Instead, the existent Colonel Jack is 'pleasant and delightful', and contains the opportunities for reflections. That these opportunities are very rarely taken up is not Defoe's concern.

Throughout his work, Defoe uses the preface for a great variety of purposes, and only very rarely gives an adequate account of the book or



pamphlet to follow. In Memoirs of a Cavalier, he offers a list of delights to be found in the main body of the text, speculates about the identity of the author (who is, of course, Defoe himself), and hints heavily that a further volume of memoirs might be forthcoming if the present one meets a favourable reaction,

for how do we know but that this  
Author might carry it on, and have  
another Part finished which might  
not fall into the same Hands, or may  
still remain with some of his Family...  
Nor is it very improbable, but that if  
any such farther Part is in Being,  
the publishing these Two Parts may  
occasion the Proprietors of the Third  
to let the World see it... 5

In other words, Defoe is prepared to provide sequels if necessary. However, it is striking that he goes much further in his embellishments than is strictly necessary. His remarks about the proprietors of a third part of the Memoirs, and his speculations about the identity of his narrator are more than just simple devices of authentication. They leave open the possibility that Defoe, as narrator, is not fully in control of his material. Rather, he is at the mercy of external forces, like the proprietors of manuscripts, and cannot dictate the way the tale is told.

In other prefaces, he cunningly emphasises the separate, irredeemable nature of his books. In the preface to The True-Born English Man, he talks of his book as though it were some event which he no longer has control over,

I may venture to foretell, That I  
shall be Cavil'd at about my Mean  
Stile, Rough Verse, and Incorrect  
Language; Things I might indeed  
have taken more care in. But the  
Book is Printed; and tho I see some  
Faults, 'tis too late to mend them. 6

The book has become a past event, and Defoe, like Moll, has little time for self-recrimination. The pressure of time and urgency of events makes for error, and nothing Defoe can do can alter this. Elsewhere, of course, he uses the prefaces to justify his earlier work. In the preface to the Serious Reflections, he refers back to Crusoe and makes the extraordinary claim that 'the story, though allegorical, is also historical', and that 'there is a man alive, and well known too, the actions of whose life, are the just subject of these volumes' (Serious Reflections, pp. ix-x). Defoe

---

5. Daniel Defoe, Memoirs of a Cavalier (1720), ed. J.T. Boulton (Oxford, 1978), p. 4.

6. See Selected Poetry and Prose of Daniel Defoe, ed. Shugrue, p. 41.

provides no supporting evidence for this assertion, and it seems very unlikely that it is more than a piece of special pleading.

Defoe's use of his prefaces indicates that it is possible to present the novels as something beyond his control. This need not be entirely convincing, and may in part be related to the Puritan distaste for fiction. However, the preface to Moll Flanders does assist us to understand Defoe's characterization of his heroine, even if we are not obliged to believe everything he might say. The preface opens by making the conventional distinction between novels and genuine histories, placing Moll firmly with the latter. However, the editor goes on to suggest the limitations upon him when he tells us of the alterations he has made to his original. He has altered the style of certain passages, since his source is rather too rough for 'one grown Penitent and Humble' (MF, p. 1). To clean the book up further, certain very vicious parts have been omitted. The editor quietly admits that 'there cannot be the same Life, the same Brightness and Beauty, in relating the penitent Part, as is in the criminal Part' (MF, p. 2), but the blame for this lies not in the narration itself, but in the 'Gust and Palate of the Reader' (MF, p. 2).

The book has then been somewhat refined by its editor, but he is at the mercy not only of his heroine, but also of his readers. Defoe is presenting himself as a person of limited power, very much the victim of others, rather than the reprehensible purveyor of filth. He goes further than simply disclaiming responsibility for the book's material. When he states the central theme of the book, he seems to get it wrong,

THROUGHOUT the infinite Variety of this Book, this Fundamental is most strictly adhered to; there is not a wicked Action in any Part of it, but is first or last rendered Unhappy and Unfortunate: There is not a superlative Villain brought upon the Stage, but either he is brought to an unhappy End, or brought to be a Penitent: There is not an ill Thing mention'd, but it is condemn'd, even in the Relation, nor a vertuous just Thing, but it carries its Praise along with it...(MF, p. 3)

On examining the book, we can see that this simply is not the case. Moll's wickedness does not, it is true, lead to complete calmness, but she does succeed in living off the spoils of her crime with as little self-reproach as Singleton. The editor admits himself that Moll's penitence was not as lasting as it might have been,

...where she liv'd it seems, to  
be very old; but was not so extraordinary  
a Penitent, as she was at first; it  
seems only that she always spoke with  
Abhorrence of her former Life, and of  
every Part of it.

(ME, p. 5)

This again is misleading. Moll does not recount her former life with horror and abhorrence, but with verve, gusto and glee.

The preface, then, establishes Defoe's partial responsibility for, and partial insight into, his subject matter. His attempts to disclaim responsibility are interesting because of the way they present the material of the book as something beyond his control. One reason for this is Defoe's search for realism, for the uncluttered presentation of the narrator's view of the world, presented as though it were genuine. However, Defoe's lack of comprehension of the events of the narrative is matched by an equal incomprehension on the part of the narrator herself. As one critic puts it, Moll is caught in a muddle, which is her simultaneous possession of 'a zest for criminal ingenuity and a taste for moral preach-ment'.<sup>7</sup> Moll is certainly in such a muddle, but so are Defoe's other narrators, and so, to an extent, is Defoe himself.

The problem for Defoe and his narrators is that because of urgency, or circumstances beyond their control, they are constrained to act under pressure. Given the difficult circumstances, they make errors, and these can be either excused or apologised for. As in the picaresque, the need to act is paramount. All Defoe's narrators are endangered, and only prompt remedial action will save them. When they do engage in reflection (as Crusoe does on discovering the bag of money), they often misconstrue their experiences, and wax excessively rhetorical. Defoe too behaves in this way as editor. He is required to act, but not wholly free to do so. The restraints upon him are the limitations of his narrators, and his understanding of their experiences is not necessarily correct. As we shall see, even the narrators themselves often misunderstand their experiences.

The preface offers us a religious view of events, but raises

---

7. Howard L. Koonce, 'Moll's Muddle : Defoe's Use of Irony in Moll Flanders,' ELH XIX (1963), 379. Koonce puts forward a very interesting view of the conflicts within the book, but proper doubts have been raised about some of his remarks in Pat Rogers, 'Moll's Memory,' English, XXIV (1975), 67-72. There is also some consideration of this question in M.E. Novak, 'Defoe's "Indifferent Monitor": The Complexity of Moll Flanders,' Eighteenth Century Studies, III (1969), 351-365.

doubts about the effectiveness of Moll's penitence. When she herself introduces her narrative, the environment she sees herself in is a social one, not a religious one. She begins by reminding us of her criminal origins, and gives us only a criminal's alias for her name,

MY True Name is so well known in  
the Records, or Registers at Newgate,  
and in the Old-Baily, and there are  
some Things of such Consequence  
still depending there, relating  
to my particular Conduct, that it  
is not to be expected I should set  
my Name, of the Account of my  
Family to this Work...

(MF, p. 7)

The concealed identity is almost a common-place of many types of early eighteenth-century fiction, especially the roman à clef.<sup>8</sup> However, in Moll's case, it serves to show how dangerous and estranging Moll's background is. Her social world is seen as wholly material, and no theological or spiritual rhetoric is used to describe her destitution. Certainly, this world is much more perilous than Crusoe's family circle. Even if we accept that Crusoe's world was inherently volatile and socially unstable, we can see that Moll's is much less comfortable. Even before the main narrative starts, she has been left alone, and is required to act to ensure survival. Crusoe acted on the basis of inclination, but Moll has no such choice.

It is at this point that the book's similarity to the picaresque becomes most apparent, but the relationship between Moll Flanders and the picaresque novel is not all that easy to define. Moll's solitary and dangerous childhood is certainly similar to that of the picaro, but it is difficult to be any more precise than that. M.E. Novak talks of the relationship in a more straightforward way when he says, 'Moll's was the kind of ironic narrative that Defoe might have inherited from picaresque fiction directly or through the influence of the picaresque on criminal biography'.<sup>9</sup> It is very tempting to agree with Novak, but there are problems implicit in his definition of the picaresque. If the most appropriate kind of narrative to inherit from the picaresque is ironic, then it seems that Novak believes the picaresque to be ironic. But if we see irony as the conscious indication of the narrator's failings, or the implicit author's undertaking to expose his narrator's lack of perception, then no such irony is present in picaresque fiction. In the

8. See John J. Richetti, Popular Fiction Before Richardson, (Oxford, 1969).

9. Novak, 'Defoe's "Indifferent Monitor"', p. 352.



novels examined in Chapter Three, the narrators' views were clearly meant to be read as authoritative. In none of the novels was there any indication of a more sophisticated controlling figure, pointing out the weaknesses in the narrator. Consequently, though we may still wish to call Moll ironic, its ironic nature is not part of its inheritance from picaresque fiction. The nearest thing to irony in the picaresque is the consistent cynicism of the books. Irony here would be the revelation that life is fundamentally ignoble and squalid. There is evidence for such a view in Moll, but that book is much more strikingly lacking in cynicism.<sup>10</sup>

If we are to call the book picaresque, it will display the characteristics of the novels described in Chapter Three. In material terms this would mean that Moll was a pseudo-autobiography, narrated by a picaro, showing squalid origins and a lack of domestic stability, dealing with the relationships between masters and servants, and showing how the narrator responds to the discovery that life is harsh and cruel. In formal terms, this would mean that Moll was centrally concerned with the vicissitudes of Fortune. In dealing with Crusoe, it became apparent that the book lacked the single-mindedness of the picaresque, and the same is true, to an extent, of Moll. However, in the later book, the indecision over theme, and the presentation of contrary views is much more closely incorporated into the character of the narrator. The confusion in Moll is Moll's; whereas the confusions in Crusoe were, more probably, Defoe's.

Moll opens her account of her life by telling us how sordid her background was. However, after the age of three she is raised by a kindly nurse who instils in her some religious sense. Moll is taught three things, and their order of remembrance is as significant as the order of priorities in Crusoe's daily calendar,

BUT that which was worth all the rest, she bred them up very Religiously, being herself a very sober pious Woman. (2.) Very Housewifly and Clean, and, (3) Very Mannerly, and with good Behaviour... (MF, p.10)

Moll stresses the religious education she receives, but such concerns are very quickly dropped. Just as with Crusoe's priority list, religion is given prime place, but yet seems to have little effect on behaviour. It is further stressed that the nurse cares for Moll, even if this care is inadequate protection from the world. When Moll discovers she is to go

---

10. See Arthur W. Secord, Studies in the Narrative Method of Defoe (Urbana, Ill., 1924), passim. Also relevant here are the discussions of Moll in the works by Miller, Parker and Whitbourn, mentioned in Chapter Three.



into service, she is horri<sup>fi</sup>ed and deeply distressed. This causes similar distress to the 'good Motherly Nurse' (MF, p. 11), who tries to comfort Moll. Such a domestic scene is certainly very different from the picaro's introduction to life as a servant. Moll's horror at a life of service is never adequately explained in the novel, but becoming a servant is certainly presented as a lapse into hardship. For the picaro, on the other hand, becoming a servant was a means of escape from hardship, and he had no-one to share his distress as Moll's nurse does.

Though Moll's background is certainly unstable, it is much more comfortable than that of the picaro. Interestingly, this episode is set in Colchester, and Defoe talks elsewhere of that town as being noted for its more enlightened and humane treatment of paupers - 'There are two CHARITY SCHOOLS set up here, and carried on by a generous subscription, with very good success'.<sup>11</sup> So though Moll's upbringing is certainly unstable, it is much less harsh than that of the picaro. Despite this relative softening of the picaresque, Moll is still to be disillusioned at a very early age. Her unexplained repugnance at going into service is expressed by her desire to be a 'Gentlewoman'. Very innocently, Moll hopes to move rapidly through the social ranks, by dint of her work as a spinner. Such naiveté is seen as a source of amusement at first, but eventually makes Moll's nurse weep. We have here the first signs of the book's recurrent concern with social mobility.

In Crusoe, we saw that the static, hierarchical conception of society held by Crusoe's father was actually contradicted by reports of that man's younger behaviour. In Moll, we see society as much more volatile than it ever became in Crusoe. Moll's continual desire to be a 'Gentlewoman' is first of all made ironic in the way she mistakes a prostitute for just such a 'Gentlewoman'. Later, the book turns to examine the forces which thwart her progress, some of which are material, and some of which could loosely be described as spiritual.

Moll's concern with gentility is echoed by Colonel Jack's concern to be a 'Gentleman'. In Jack's tale, the narrator is unsure of his origins, but relies on local legend to confirm his belief that he is the offspring

---

11. Daniel Defoe, A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain (1724), ed. G.D.H. Cole and D.C. Browning (1928, rev.ed., London, 1974), p.33.

of a 'Man of Quality' and a 'Gentlewoman', put out to nurse to remove his (unmarried?) parents from 'the Importunities that usually attend the Misfortune of having a Child to keep that should not be seen or heard of' (CJ, p. 3). Jack goes on to tell us that his father is thought to have laid down only the one stipulation about Jack's education,

...if I liv'd to come to any bigness, capable to understand the meaning of it, she should always take care to bid me remember, that I was a Gentleman, and this he said was all the Education he would desire of her for me, for he did not doubt, he said, but that sometime or other the very hint would inspire me with Thoughts suitable to my Birth, and that I would certainly act like a Gentleman, if I believed myself to be so.

(CJ, p. 3)

This sense of innate gentility, which does in fact sustain Jack and prevent him from falling into the most reprehensible behaviour, is certainly analogous to Moll's desire for security and comfort. Like Defoe himself, Moll and Jack are acutely aware of the stratification of society, and have firm views about their own proper position in their society.<sup>12</sup>

Moll's desire for gentility makes her something of a local celebrity. She is taken up, for a while, by the Mayor of Colchester and his daughters, largely as a novel plaything. During this period, Moll reveals that what she meant by her desire for gentility is 'to be able to get my Bread by my own Work' (MF, p. 13). When she offers an example of the kind of person she has in mind, we see the ironic innocence of her desire. She mentions someone who fulfils ~~Moll's~~<sup>her</sup> requirements, and though this person is a lace-mender, she is also known as a bawd of some sort. The interesting part is when Moll says, 'I insisted she was a Gentlewoman, and I would be such a Gentlewoman as that' (MF, p. 14). This is obviously an ironic statement, but the ironies are many. First of all, there is the paucity of Moll's conception revealed by the fact that this person is a mere lace-mender. Secondly, there is the further irony that this person is so lacking in gentility as to be a bawd. And thirdly, there is the irony that Moll does indeed turn out to be just such a

---

12. The analogy between Defoe's aspirations and those of his characters is an attractive one, but also a dangerous one. It is discussed thoroughly, if rather too sympathetically, in Michael Shinagel, Daniel Defoe and Middle-Class Gentility (Cambridge Mass., 1968).

Gentlewoman, though she cannot realise at the time the accuracy of her prediction. This is one of the rare occasions, like Crusoe teaching Friday his theology, where we can be sure of the consciousness of the irony. As Ian Watt says, 'we can be certain that the irony is conscious because its tenor is supported by Defoe's other writings' (The Rise of the Novel, p. 126).<sup>13</sup> Even without the support of Defoe's other writings, the multi-layered nature of this ironic prediction makes it clearly conscious.

Though the irony is very striking in retrospect, and the unconscious appropriateness of Moll's remark is very vivid, even the retrospective Moll makes no comment on it. This is very different from the practice of the other narrators when they make such an ironic prediction. In each of the other novels, the narrator either makes such a prediction himself, or hears someone else make it, or comments upon some structural device which fulfils the same object. In Colonel Jack, for example, the fates of Jack's two 'brothers' provide the opportunity for just such a comment. In Crusoe, the narrator has brothers, whose parallel fates provide an emblem for his own end, which are used by Crusoe's father to make him stay at home. Also, while living in Brazil as a plantation owner, Crusoe becomes bored and laments his state,

In this Manner I used to look upon  
my Condition with the utmost Regret.  
I had no body to converse with but  
now and then this Neighbour; no Work  
to be done, but by the Labour of my  
Hands; and I used to say, I liv'd  
just like a man cast away upon some  
desolate Island, that had no body  
there but himself.

(RC, p. 35)

If this had been left there, it would have been similar to the episode in Moll - the narrator unwittingly predicting his own fate. But Crusoe does not stop here. He goes on to say,

But how just has it been, and how  
should all Men reflect, that when  
they compare their present Conditions  
with others that are worse, Heaven  
may oblige them to make the Exchange,  
and be convinc'd of their former  
Felicity by their Experience.

(RC, p. 35)

---

13. The debate over Defoe's irony is continuing, without a fully satisfactory conclusion being reached. The most important contributions are two papers by M.E. Novak, 'Defoe's Use of Irony,' in The Uses of Irony: Papers on Defoe and Swift Read at a Clark Library Seminar, April 2, 1966 (Los Angeles, 1966), and 'Conscious Irony in Moll Flanders: Facts and Problems,' College English, XXVI (1964), 198-204. See also John Preston, The Created Self: The Reader's Role in Eighteenth-Century Fiction (London, 1970).

This then becomes one of the events which Crusoe uses to justify a Providential account of his experiences. In a similar episode in Captain Singleton, the narrator is warned by a companion about his likely fate,

he came to me, takes me by the Hand, and into my Face too, very gravely, My Lad, says he, thou art born to do a World of Mischief: thou hast commenced Pyrate very young, but have a Care for the Gallows, young Man; have a Care I say, for thou wilt be an eminent Thief.

(CS, p. 25) 14

Singleton is never concerned with a Providential patterning in his life, so he does not comment upon the appropriateness of the prediction.

Moll's silence at this point indicates that even retrospectively she does not seek patterns in her life. She is not, as Crusoe is, concerned with the justification of Providence, for her world is even less Providential than his. The ironic predictions, along with the recurrence of characters throughout the book, suggest patterning of which Moll is unaware, and that helps us say something about Defoe's attitude towards his heroine. One of the most interesting features of Moll's narration is the way she retains at least a part of her innocence throughout. The picaresque became worldly and knowing very quickly. Crusoe, too, learnt something from his experiences. In Moll's case, her failure to mention the patterns which readers can detect reveals a kind of naiveté in the understanding of her own life. Her innocence also figures in the narration itself, in the way she continually falls for the advances of suitors, but it is more important to notice how Defoe uses this innocence as a feature of the narration as well as the narrative.

This innocence is engaging as well as being naive. As G.A. Starr puts it, 'Sympathy keeps breaking in, and our ironic detachment - along with Defoe's - is tempered by imaginative identification'.<sup>15</sup> Clearly, Moll is not recommending to us the ruthlessness of the picaresque and her eagerness to think the best of people, with her readiness to forgive are endearing. Yet this is not the same as imaginative identification. Since the narrative reveals more than the narrator notices, our detachment is maintained,

---

14. Crusoe also receives such a warning which he ignores. He does, however, retrospectively recognise its accuracy in a way that Singleton seems not to. See RC, p. 15.

15. Defoe and Casuistry (Princeton, N. J., 1971), p. 114



though we may still sympathise with Moll's plight. It is the interaction of the two contrary impulses which makes the book interesting, and innovative as prose fiction.

The book follows Moll's search for comfort and security. She originally, and naively, sees the path to stability being her own efforts as a worker, but, as one critic puts it, 'what Moll will have to learn to do in the course of her narrative is to relinquish this middle-class dream of honest and self-sufficient survival'.<sup>16</sup> What leads her to abandon her early hopes? In the picaresque novel, the narrator is disillusioned very quickly by poverty, starvation and harsh treatment at the hands of others. For Moll, the agency of disillusion is more spiritual, being a form of romantic attachment. At the opening of Moll, we have 'an unfortunate girl...who comes to aspire to a more genteel life than the drudgery of going out to service, the usual fate of girls in her class and circumstances'.<sup>17</sup> Surprisingly, though, she is put in her place by her seduction, rather than by any of her attempts to rise socially. She is seduced by the elder brother of the family she is living with. The brother is described as an accomplished and experienced rake,

...a gay Gentleman that knew the  
Town,as well as the Country, and  
tho' he had Levity enough to  
do an ill natur'd thing, yet had  
too much Judgment of things to pay  
too dear for his Pleasures; he began  
with that unhappy Snare to all  
Women, (viz.) taking Notice upon all  
Occasions how pretty I was...  
(MF, p. 19)

The endangering features here are the rake's sophistication against Moll's innocence, and her vanity against his flattery. His seduction is carefully planned and well executed. She recognises her own culpability in the affair, when she acknowledges that 'my Vanity was the Cause of it' (MF, p. 19). Such a sense of personal involvement is very different from the picaresque's interpretation of his misfortunes, which all arise from the cruelty of others, or from a universal sense of frustration.

The most important thing about this early seduction is not that it represents the loss of Moll's physical virginity, about which she is characteristically coy, but that it represents the loss of her innocence

---

16. John J. Richetti, Defoe's Narratives (Oxford, 1975), p. 99.

17. J.A.Michie, 'The Unity of Moll Flanders' in Knaves and Swindlers, ed. Christine J. Whitbourn (London, 1974), p.77.



in a wider, if not in a complete sense. At one point, Moll overhears a conversation between her future seducer and his sister, in which he praises Moll's merits. His sister replies in a very worldly and cynical way,

I wonder at you Brother, says  
the Sister: Betty wants but one  
Thing, but she had as good want  
every Thing, for the Market is  
against our Sex just now; and if  
a young Woman have Beauty, Birth,  
Breeding, Wit, Sense, Manners,  
Modesty, and all these to an  
Extream; yet if she have not  
Money, she's no Body, she had as  
good want them all, for nothing  
but Money now recommends a Woman...

(MF, p. 20)

The sense of economic urgency is confirmed throughout this novel, and in much of Roxana as well. Moll's innocence prevents her from realising the truth of the sister's statement, and her vanity encourages her to think herself a worthy match for the elder Brother.

The role of financial equality in marriage was a recurrent theme of Defoe's conduct books, especially Religious Courtship and The Complete English Gentleman, and even figured prominently in the haggling over the dowry of Defoe's daughter Sophia.<sup>18</sup> In Moll, it is used to show the opposition of the cynical and the innocent views of the world. It is significant that the naive and emotional younger brother denies his sister's words, even if they are borne out by the remainder of the book. It is significant too that Moll is very reticent on the whole subject, and apart from castigating her own innocence, she makes few comments about the issue of wealth against personality. One critic claims that 'she learns that charm, wit, grace, and beauty are insufficient assets to the gentle world, but that diamonds are a girl's best friend'.<sup>19</sup> No doubt this accurately reflects the world of the novel as readers see it, but Moll is never as certain as this. In the early part of the novel, she seems uncertain about her role, and makes very few recriminations. She seems to accept the elder brother's behaviour as the way of the world, and to accept her own gullibility as inevitable. The behaviour of the younger brother at least allows the possibility of behaviour motivated not by economic advancement but by spiritual forces, and Moll's innocence is maintained

---

18. See G.A. Starr's edition of Moll, p. 363.

19. R.R. Columbus, 'Conscious Artistry in Moll Flanders,' SEL, III (1963), 420. There must be some doubt, surely, about how many of these qualities Moll possesses. It is difficult to find evidence for Moll being witty, or graceful.

for a surprisingly long time.

Though Moll does, like the picaro, recognise the power of economic necessity, it is by no means the only force which motivates her conduct. As her seduction is completed, and the elder brother gives her more and more money, Moll stresses her own culpability in the affair. She does not see the opportunity as an occasion for self-advancement, and becomes in effect a willing accomplice to the elder brother's schemes. Eventually, he gives her a hundred guineas, and she says, 'I made no more Resistance to him, but let him do just what he pleas'd; and as often as he pleas'd'.<sup>20</sup> The money she receives is not seen by her as a bribe, but as an earnest of sincerity, as confirmation of good faith. Despite the financial reward, she does not realise that her looks and her body are marketable assets. She sees the loss of virginity, even in retrospect, not as a necessary economic act - '...for from this Day, being forsaken of my Vertue, and my Modesty, I had nothing of Value left to recommend me, either to God's Blessing, or Man's Assistance' (MF, p. 29). It is clear that Moll is not scheming to entrap the elder brother, and that she still recognises the possible assistance of God and man. Even in retrospect, she does not qualify her view that love is a powerful and enfeebling motive.

It is at this point that the younger brother, Robin, declares his love for Moll. Obviously she is thus put in a very hazardous dilemma, in which economic stability is to be put in conflict with emotional stability. Is she to accept Robin, which may involve him being cut off from his family and his money; or is she to reject him in favour of the wealthier, but less dependable, elder brother? For the picaro, there would be no problem involved in this situation. The affair with the elder brother has been both convenient and profitable, and some way might be found to continue it, while comfortably married to the younger brother. What makes the situation difficult for Moll is not any moral qualms she may have about moving from one brother to another, but her sense of attachment. Her individuality, which is much greater than Crusoe's, is expressed by her emotional singularity. She even goes so far as to say to the elder brother, 'I had much rather, since it is to come to that unhappy Length, be your Whore than your Brothers Wife' (MF, p. 40). Her distress even causes her to fall ill, and physicians pronounce her to be 'IN LOVE' (MF, p. 42). She is still maintaining a romantic conception of her affair, though the reader can see

---

20. Moll is consistently coy about sex, and uses a number of similar locutions to avoid talking about it. Though this may be the stealthy hand of the editor as promised in the introduction, it is certainly very different from the treatment of sex in the picaresque novel. See Robert Alter, Rogue's Progress: Studies in the Picaresque Novel (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), p. 38.

that the elder brother is prepared to pay to get her off his hands. Her eventual marriage to Robin is casually dismissed, as is Crusoe's marriage. We are told only that for five years they 'liv'd very agreeably together', until he dies, leaving Moll 'a Widow with about 1200L. in my Pocket' (MF, p. 58).

All in all, this whole episode serves to show the emergence in the novel of what Moll later calls 'that Cheat call'd LOVE' (MF, p. 60). Moll's view of romance is rather different from what we may take to be Defoe's view, and also to the more conventional views of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In the context of his own period, Defoe can be seen as relatively liberal on the vexed question of romantic love as a basis for matrimony. However, he still saw that romantic love and sexual attraction were very closely linked, and that marriage on the basis of sexual attraction 'brings madness, desperation, ruin of families, disgrace, self-murders, killings of bastards, etc.'<sup>21</sup> Moll never seems to evolve any coherent policy towards her dilemma, and that is one of the ways we can distinguish between her and her creator. In the case of her early sexual conduct, it is very striking that she makes few, if any, reflections, as though she has learnt little from these experiences. In the Preface, the 'editor' excuses this part of the book by claiming that it 'has so many happy Turns given to it' expose the Crime, and warn all whose Circumstances are adapted to it, of the ruinous End of such Things, and the foolish Thoughtless and abhorr'd Conduct of both the Parties' (MF, p. 2). The editor may point out the appropriate moral reading, but Moll does not. Her comments are very limited, and are never as strict as this. Though she seems to recognise the shoddiness of the elder brother's behaviour in 'shifting off his Whore into his Brothers Arms for a Wife' (MF, p. 58), she retains her great affection for him. She may recognise that love is a cheat, but she rarely strives against it, and her condemnation affects her behaviour very little. The comparison with Crusoe's conversion is both noticeable and interesting.

Significantly, Moll does not interpret the elder brother's behaviour as the initial cruelty which makes her turn against the world - as the picaro's first mistreatment is. Love is the area of Moll's life where the force of chance is most prominent, such as the chance of her being with child or not, or just the chance of her falling in love,...

---

21. This issue is discussed at length, showing Defoe's contributions to the debate, in Lawrence Stone, op. cit., pp. 149-216.

as she does with Jemmy. Yet though this part of her life is dominated by chance, and no Providential explanation can be offered, it is also the area in which Moll's moral scruples are most active. If the book is divided into criminal adventures on the one hand, and romantic interludes on the other, Moll saves her piety for the latter.<sup>22</sup> In her criminal adventures, her self-recriminations are infrequent and unconvincing, though the reader can detect within these adventures some signs of patterning. Only in her romantic adventures does she detect evil, or show genuine repugnance or abhorrence, although in that area of her life she is least in control of her own behaviour. It may be suggested that we can see the central conflict in the book as what Stone calls the growth of affective individualism, placed within the context of a society which is hostile to such individualism, and placed further under economic constraint.

Moll's second marriage is much more the result of calculation than of genuine affection or passion - 'I was resolv'd now to be Married, or Nothing, and to be well Married, or not at all' (MF, p. 60). However, even within the context of this prudent behaviour, Moll once again behaves very imprudently in spending her husband's money, and in her current ideas of love. She learns that life in London is very different from life in the relatively rural Colchester, a fact which was already apparent in the behaviour of the elder brother,

I was not to expect at London,  
what I had found in the Country;  
that Marriages were here the  
Consequences of politick  
Schemes, for forming Interests  
and carrying on Business, and  
that LOVE had no share, or but  
very little in the Matter.

(MF, p. 67)

None of Moll's own marriages, including this second one, really deserves to be called a 'politick scheme'. She is impolitic in spending so readily, and she is certainly impolitic in falling for a fellow-criminal in Jemmy. Overall, her reliance on love is much greater than her interest permits. At one point she refers to a mistress of Rochester, 'that lov'd his Company, but would not admit him farther, to have the Scandal of a Whore, without the Joy' (MF, p. 64), and this is pertinent to her own case.

---

22. William Bowman Piper, 'Moll Flanders as a Structure of Topics', SEL, IX (1969), 489 - 502, suggests a tri-partite division of the book into sexual adventures, adventures in theft, and Virginia adventures. For the current purposes, the episodes in Virginia can be divided into sexual (like the incest episode), or criminal (like her transportation).



147

She often acts as a whore, but never joyously.

One critic claims that 'Moll has to set aside many feelings and attitudes which she cannot afford...Moll lives a life crowded with event and absolutely bare of feeling'.<sup>23</sup> It is true that her life, like the lives of all Defoe's narrators, is very congested, but it is surely wrong to see it as bare of feeling. There are many occasions where Moll might be well advised to be less feeling, and where in fact she does not do so. This imprudent excess of feeling is most apparent in those two episodes of the book dealing with incest and abortion. Her unwittingly incestuous marriage is one of the instances of re-discovered family which appear throughout Defoe's fiction. Mention has already been made of the reunion between Friday and his father, and Jack's re-discovery of his wife in Virginia. In Roxana, the re-appearance of the heroine's daughter is the most important feature of the second half of the book. A number of such reunions are apparent in Moll, most notably the re-appearance of Jemmy in Newgate.

However, the most important illustration of reunion is certainly the revelation that Moll has unwittingly re-married into her own family. This is her third marriage, and before embarking upon it, Moll has tried to make certain that her spouse is not just after her money. Satisfied that he is not, Moll concentrates on the ensuing financial rather than romantic arrangements. After they have arrived at the husband's plantations in Virginia, Moll listens to his mother's life story, and realises with horror that she is listening to her own mother talking. Moll's reaction is extremely powerful.

I WAS now the most unhappy of  
all Women in the World: O had  
the Story never been told me,  
all had been well; it had been  
no Crime to have lain with my  
Husband, since as to his being  
my Relation, I had known nothing  
of it.

(MF, p. 88)

Were she only concerned with financial stability, or material comfort, she could tolerate this style of living. But Moll repeatedly asserts that her position is repugnant to 'nature'. She is not in any way responsible for this state, which seems to be the result of chance (and, on a narrative

---

23. Denis Donoghue, 'The Values of Moll Flanders,'  
Sewanee Review, LXXI (1963), 287-303.



level, most implausible chance), but she still feels guilty and ashamed. This would certainly indicate that her life is not 'bare of feeling' and that she has a much greater emotional life than the picaro.

Her secrecy about the incestuous marriage lasts three years, but the truth eventually slips out in a quarrel, causing her husband/brother to fall ill. One critic sees in this illness a parallel to Moll's own illness before her marriage to Robin.<sup>24</sup> This critic also sees the two episodes as being closely related - Moll's illness is seen as a kind of ironic punishment for her crime in deceiving Robin. Certainly, she does seem to think of her marriage to Robin as incestuous, by thinking of the elder brother while she is lying with him, and G.A. Starr has pointed out the casuistical basis for equating deeds and wishes.<sup>25</sup> Moll herself, it is important to notice, makes no mention of any parallel between the events, but that alone does not deny its existence.

Defoe could be said to be surreptitiously unifying his narrative in ways that his narrator does not notice, and ironically exposing her lack of perceptiveness. However, the basis of such a claim is unconvincing. The Robin episode and the incestuous marriage are only very loosely related. Moll's three years of reticence has no parallel and generally the incident stands on its own, obtruding from rather than cohering with the remainder of the novel. Moll is not the only eighteenth-century novel to raise the question of incest - it appears in Tom Jones as a false fear - and a reading of Stone's book makes it apparent that the subject was obviously one under public discussion. Given the congested accommodation available, acts of incest must have been widespread, though incestuous marriage must still have been rare. However, only in Moll do we have so extended a treatment of revulsion. Moll describes her feelings at some length,

I was really alienated from him  
in the Consequence of these Things;  
indeed I mortally hated him as a  
Husband, and it was impossible to  
remove that riveted Aversion I had  
to him; at the same time it being an  
unlawful incestuous living added to  
that Aversion; and tho' I had no  
great concern about it in point of  
Conscience, yet every thing added  
to making Cohabiting with him the  
most nauseous thing to me in the  
World; and I think verily it was  
come to such a height, that I

---

24. Douglas Brooks, 'Moll Flanders: An Interpretation,' EC, XIX (1969), 46-59. See also Brooks, Number and Pattern in the Eighteenth-Century Novel (London, 1973).

25. Defoe and Casuistry, p. 123. See also pp. 134-5.

could almost as willingly have  
embrac'd a Dog, as have let him  
offer any thing of that kind to me,  
for which Reason I could not bear  
the thoughts of coming between the  
Sheets with him...

(MF, p. 98)

When she eventually lets slip what has happened, her brother/husband makes two attempts at suicide, and eventually falls into a consumption. This indicates that the horror is not Moll's alone. Throughout the book, there is a sense that some actions are 'naturally' repugnant, and one of these seems to be incest.

Defoe's views on this subject, or at least the views of Moll and her brother/husband, are more extreme than one might expect. M.E. Novak has shown that Defoe's views are stricter than any of the writers on natural law.<sup>26</sup> Pufendorf, for instance, accepted that other countries might sanction incest, and that the European revulsion to it might only be the result of custom. Even the customs of the time were much less severe than Moll would lead us to believe. Stone tells us,

...the punishments meted out by Church courts in cases of incest in Elizabethan England were surprisingly lenient, and there is no reason to think that sodomy and bestiality were more repugnant to popular standards of morality than breaking of the laws of incest, which must have been common in those overcrowded houses where adolescent children were still at home. 27

There is no reason to think that courts had become any more severe by the 1650s, when Moll's incest took place. Bearing these factors in mind, Novak's conclusion about the whole episode is that 'For Defoe, incest was a violation of the laws of God and Nature. Moll may follow her self-interest in most areas of life, but, incapable of enduring an incestuous marriage, she prefers poverty in England to a life of physical comfort and moral horror in Virginia.'<sup>28</sup>

Novak's conclusion seems just, but it is still worth remembering that this is not the only occasion when Moll forsakes her own self-interest. Much has been made of Moll's rather casual attitude towards her children, though Stone's researches reveal how common such 'fostering-out' was.<sup>29</sup>

---

26. Defoe and the Nature of Man, pp. 108-110.

27. The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800, p. 309.

28. Defoe and the Nature of Man, p. 110.

29. See Stone, op. cit., pp. 267-99.

However, it is worthy of note that Moll has very strict views about abortion. At one point, she is likely to bear a rather inconvenient child,

my Apprehensions were really that  
I should Miscarry; I should not say  
Apprehensions, for indeed I would  
have been glad to miscarry, but I  
cou'd never be brought to entertain  
so much as a thought of endeavouring  
to Miscarry, or of taking anything  
to make me Miscarry, I abhorr'd, I  
say so much as the thought of it.

(MF, p. 161) 30

Seen in terms of self-interest and policy, Moll would be well-advised to abort. Her rejection of this recourse seems fundamental, but not carefully thought out. In the words of G.A. Starr, 'she rejects abortion (as she had rejected incest) on instinctive rather than ethical grounds'.<sup>31</sup>

So far, then, Moll has been given a very individualised characterisation, with eccentricities and inconsistencies of view-point which cannot be explained as simply Defoe's blindness. Her motivation on the basis of gentility, economic self-sufficiency, and love, at respective times, is very different indeed from the single-minded ruthlessness of the picaro. This may suggest some principle of organisation behind the work, which combines material and spiritual affairs. However, in the first half of the book at least, Moll's conduct is not affected by the secret hints of Providence, which in retrospect can be seen as shaping, as Crusoe's was. Nor does her behaviour fall into any coherent system of punishment and reward. The intensity of her emotional reactions to love, incest and abortion make Moll a much more complex character than Crusoe, and one who is understood and described by her creator in a much more realistic way. Crusoe's emotions were often referred to, but were described only on occasions of guilt and loneliness, each of which could later be fitted into the Providential scheme.<sup>32</sup> Moll's internal emotions are much more extensive and varied, and they rely much less on the suggestions of supernatural intrusion. Even conscience does not seem to be a major factor (despite what is said in the preface), since she is easy in her conscience about incest, though emotionally disturbed by it.

30. Examples of the potions available to those in the same plight as Moll are given by Stone, op. cit., p. 266.

31. Defoe and Casuistry, p. 142.

32. See Benjamin Boyce, 'The Question of Emotion in Defoe,' SP, L (1953), 44-58.

In the criminal adventures, Moll more frequently refers to her guilt, and expresses greater disapproval of her former conduct. She sees most of her thieving as voluntary, and so sees herself as culpable, though throughout her treatment of this part of her life there is a deal of equivocation and self-justification evident. Her first thefts arise from necessity, and in these places the book approaches as near as it gets to the world of the picaresque. We saw earlier how Moll thought of London as the place of finance and policy, and how her emotional life prevented her from being sufficiently single-minded there. Similarly, in the question of theft she does not fit in with the picaresque's forthright economic policy. She is aware of theft as the only alternative to starvation, but has a much greater sense of the moral ramifications of her behaviour, even if that sense expresses itself imperceptively and sporadically.

Necessity is used as an exculpatory plea on a number of occasions. Moll deceives most of her suitors about her financial position, and tries to excuse this by claiming that it is necessary for her own protection. The implication that Moll is living in the competitive, hostile picaresque world is certainly present, but the reader need not accept it. Moll's view is that if something is necessary it is excusable, and M.E. Novak has shown that such a view is in keeping with other Defoe statements about Natural Law.<sup>33</sup> This reliance on an exculpatory necessity is made most prominent when Moll is in difficulties, and is discussing her affairs with a banker,

I was now a loose unguided Creature,  
and had no Help, no Assistance, no  
Guide for my Conduct: I knew what I  
aim'd at, and what I wanted, but knew  
nothing how to pursue the End by  
direct Means; I wanted to be plac'd  
in a settled State of Living, and  
had I happen'd to meet with a good  
sober Husband, I should have been  
as faithful and true a Wife as Virtue  
it self cou'd have form'd: If I had  
been otherwise, the Vice came in  
always at the Door of Necessity, not  
at the Door of Inclination...

(MF, pp. 128-9)

In fact, Moll's attempts to excuse her lapses are never fully convincing. Her greatest criminal excesses arise much more from the fear of impending

---

33. See 'The Problem of Necessity in Defoe's Fiction,'  
Defoe and the Nature of Man, Chapter III.



or eventual poverty than from poverty itself. Unlike the picaro, she is never in serious danger of starvation or death, other than as a result of her crimes. Rather than being an avenue of escape from hardship, her crimes lead her into greater danger.

Though we need not believe Moll's interpretation of her own life, the plea of exculpatory necessity recurs. The banker describes his current wife as 'a Whore not by Necessity, which is the common Bait of your Sex, but by Inclination, and for the Sake of Vice' (MF, p. 135). Moll accepts the man's tale, and uses it in part to justify her own behaviour. She does see the conduct of others in very simple moral terms - acting from necessity is excusable, but acting viciously from inclination is intolerable and reprehensible. However, this clear moral view is muddled when emotional attachment is involved. She never applies the strict standard to the elder brother in Colchester, to her mother, or to Jemmy, the highwayman. Her view of her own conduct, too, is evasive and self-justificatory.

Her first acts of genuine crime occur after her banker husband has died and left her poor. She is led to quote a remark that becomes familiar in this book, and in Colonel Jack and Roxana, 'Give me not Poverty lest I steal' (MF, p. 191).<sup>34</sup> Her first thefts are attributed to the Devil, rather than to her own responsibility, and this too is a familiar tactic to readers of Defoe.<sup>35</sup> Certainly, this is the first time Moll is prepared to suggest a supernatural agency, for good or ill, capable of intruding in human affairs,

THIS was the Bait, and the Devil  
who I said laid the Snare, as readily  
prompted me, as if he had spoke, for  
I remember, and shall never forget  
it, 'twas like a Voice spoken to me  
over my Shoulder, take the Bundle;  
be quick; do it this Moment...

(MF, p. 191)

But how seriously can we take this dramatic intervention by the Devil? In Crusoe, the references to prediction, dreams, 'secret hints' and other Providential paraphernalia were never fully sustained, but were sufficiently plentiful to have become an integral part of Crusoe's experience. In Moll, the reference to the Devil is isolated, and very convenient for the heroine. This makes it seem much more like a comprehensive attempt by Moll to distort her own experiences, in an effort to excuse her behaviour.

---

34. G.A.Starr refers to five other allusions to this proverb in other works by Defoe. See Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography, p. 78n.

35. Starr refers to Defoe's Political History of the Devil for a parallel passage. See MF, p. 191n.



Moll's deceptions continue, and soon after this she steals a child's necklace. If we accept the Natural Law theories as part of Defoe's basis, then one clear principle is that stealing from someone worse off than yourself is inexcusable.<sup>36</sup> In retrospect, Moll even attempts to make the theft of the child's necklace an act of public benevolence, in a very unconvincing passage of arrant self-justification,

Poverty, as I have said, harden'd  
my Heart, and my own Necessities  
made me regardless of any thing:  
The last Affair left no great  
Concern upon me, for as I did  
the poor Child no harm, I only said  
to my self, I had given the Parents  
a just Reproof for their Negligence  
in leaving the poor little Lamb  
to come home by it self, and it  
would teach them to take more  
Care of it another time.

(MF, p. 194)

Moll expands upon this notion, once it has struck her as a possible excuse. The child's mother obviously suffers from 'Vanity', and the maid whom Moll supposes to have been looking after the child becomes 'a careless Jade... taken up perhaps with some Fellow that had met her by the way' (MF, p. 195). This kind of ingenuity is typical of Moll's practise as a thief, which is characterised by opportunism and quickness of thought. Her thefts are rarely planned, but she is very ready to take opportunities which fall in her way.

This too seems to characterise her narration, which seizes hold of anything which is convenient or useful. Rather than being carefully planned and organised by Moll, it is erratic, wayward and yet very skilful in its own eclectic way. Psychologically, Moll is impulsive, cunning and much more volatile than Crusoe. Consequently, her narration is much less stable than his, but her narrative is much more psychologically appropriate than his. The conflicts of explanation and planning in Crusoe could not be understood fully as Crusoe's limitations of viewpoint. In Moll's case the limitations of the narrator are made obvious, and they are adequate ways to explain the moral imperceptiveness of the narrative. One very important difference between Moll and the picaresque novel is that the picaresque seeks to make statements about the external world, whereas Moll succeeds only in making statements about the internal world. That is to say, she gives us the world as she sees it (with some possible intrusions

---

36. An episode of this kind occurs in Colonel Jack, and it is Jack's realisation that he is about to fall into wholly reprehensible action that brings him to his senses. See Col. Jack, pp. 65-67.

by an editor) while the picaro claims to show the world as it ought to be seen.

We are now getting closer to an ironic interpretation of the book, by claiming that the interest in the narrative is the narrator's unwitting self-revelations. However, there is no need to go as far in making this claim as Dorothy Van Ghent did. Taking the episode of the child's necklace and a later one where Moll 'altruistically' takes advantage of a drunk gentleman, Van Ghent came to this conclusion,

We are left with two possibilities. Either Moll Flanders is a collection of scandal-sheet anecdotes naively patched together with the platitudes that form the morality of an impoverished soul [Defoe's], a 'sincere' soul but a confused and degraded one; or Moll Flanders is a great novel, coherent in structure, unified and given its shape and significance by a complex system of ironies. 37

What Van Ghent might mean by the 'complex system of ironies' is far from clear, and the alternatives she suggested are not the only possible ones. It seems fairer to suggest that the book is given its shape by the characteristics of its narrator, and that its significance is provided by what the narrator tells us and what we can deduce that she is withholding from us.

Moll's use of the supernatural becomes more obviously self-interested as the book goes on. Crusoe had nothing to gain by invoking Providence, only an increase in his guilt and suffering, so no such speculation was necessary in his case. Similarly, Moll's plea of necessity becomes much less convincing as the book progresses, and as she accumulates wealth steadily. When she goes on to steal for profit, Moll blames the Devil rather than herself.

THUS the Devil who began, by the help of an irresistable Poverty, to push me into this Wickedness, brought me on to a height beyond the common Rate, even when my Necessities were not so great, or the prospect of my Misery so terrifying; for I had now got into a little Vein of Work, and as I was not at a loss to handle my Needle, it was very probable, as Acquaintance came in, I might have got my Bread honestly enough.

(MF, p. 202)

There is here a sense of the limitations of excusable behaviour, just as in the incest episode, and in Colonel Jack and in Roxana. What is most striking about this passage, though, is the reference to Moll possibly earning her living by her needle. We will remember, even if she does not, that this was originally how she defined the life she wanted to lead. The fact that she is now in a position to lead this life, yet prefers to emulate the 'Gentlewoman' of the beginning, seems to indicate a degree of cohesion in Defoe's planning of the novel, designed to show us more about Moll than she realises. The relation between this passage and the passage in Colchester is one of irony - Moll now has what she wanted, but no longer wants it - and shows more organisation than either Moll, or the 'editor' warned us of.

Again, the most significant feature of this episode is Moll's reticence. In her own stated interpretation of her life, Moll moves from childish innocence, into poverty, into justifiable theft, then beyond the limits of excusability, finally to be rewarded for her penitence. Clearly, if there are doubts about her explanations of her wickedness, there are doubts about the probity of her repentance. Like the repentance of Guzmán de Alfarache, it patently serves the interests of the penitent. She has been caught red-handed, condemned to death, and is desperately trying to find a means of escape. Before her apprehension, she realised that she had gone too far. Her tutor in crime has been condemned to die in prison, and the recurrence of the idea of Newgate shocks Moll into a kind of storm repentance.<sup>38</sup> However, like Crusoe's first storm repentance this is a fragile thing, and is soon dispelled.

She is provided with further admonitory examples - like the arrest of two colleagues (MF, p. 209) or her first-hand view of the thief being given over to 'the Rage of the Street' (MF, p. 212). Even when she is wrongly arrested, and seeks legal reparation, her court appearance provides her with no fears. The significant date of Xmas Day, upon which she is arrested, also goes by without remark. After all these warnings, much more apparent to the reader than to Moll herself, she is eventually apprehended, and consigned to Newgate. In M.E. Novak's view, these episodes are most properly seen as unnoticed examples of Providence.

---

38. Newgate functions in Moll as an image for the worst possible fate. Arnold Kettle sees it as 'a real eighteenth-century huis clos... the world from which Moll set out and to which she comes back, defeated, to emerge as a conformist, ' ' In Defence of Moll Flanders, ' Of Books and Humankind, ed. John Butt (London, 1964), Newgate is certainly emblematic to an extent, but there is no need to go as far as Kettle does. Moll's fear of Newgate seems appropriate, given what is likely to happen to her there, and it can best be understood in terms of character, not symbolic organisation.

He discusses Moll's behaviour after her first attempt at repentance, at the fire, and he says, 'It is suggestive of divine Providence that the next time Moll attempts to steal at a fire, she is struck and almost killed by a mattress which is thrown from a window'.<sup>39</sup> However, despite these apparently Providential happenings, and the pattern which is apparent with the surprising reappearance of Jemmy, the book seems much less organised by a belief in Providence than even Crusoe was.

Moll's conversion seems much more perfunctory and self-serving than Crusoe's was, and has even less effect upon her behaviour than his had. In the oppressive atmosphere of Newgate, she feels the first stirrings of genuine remorse and abhorrence, or at least what she takes to be genuine stirrings. The sight of Jemmy imprisoned makes her feel responsible for his fate, but there is absolutely no reason for this feeling. Jemmy was a confirmed and notorious highwayman before meeting Moll, and he has simply returned to his former occupation. Once again, we are not obliged to accept, or even agree with, Moll's interpretation of events. We must also remember that she is at this point under sentence of death, and the way her contrition is expressed makes it seem very self-interested:

He visited me again the next Morning,  
and went on with his Method of  
explaining the Terms of Divine Mercy,  
which according to him consisted of  
nothing more than that of being  
sincerely desirous of it, and willing  
to accept it; only a sincere Regret  
for, and hatred of those things I  
had done which render'd me so just  
an Object of divine Vengeance...I  
was cover'd with Shame and Tears  
for things past, and yet had at the  
same time a secret surprizing Joy  
at the Prospect of being a true  
Penitent, and obtaining the Comfort  
of a Penitent, I mean the hope of  
being forgiven...

(MF, pp. 288-9)

The paradoxical concurrence of shame and joy may well be, as G.A. Starr believes, typical of all Defoe's penitent narrators.<sup>40</sup> However, Moll seems strikingly pleased by the ease of penitence, for the rewards it offers. Her reference to the 'Terms' of mercy makes the idea of a bargain, and its cheapness, all the more apparent. This stress on the convenience of

---

39. Defoe and the Nature of Man, p. 79.

40. See MF, p. 289n.



penitence must put us on our guard against taking it too seriously.

Moll's conversion seems as naive and innocent as most of her earlier behaviour. Its self-interest is much more apparent to us than to her. When she tells us of it, she is not trying to deceive us into thinking it more serious than it was. Rather, she is genuinely expressing her eagerness, which we can understand better than she. This curious kind of innocence is one of the book's most interesting features. It is apparent not only in the conversion episode, but also in other passages of self-justification, as the description of the theft of the child's necklace. Moll is not trying to get away with things she knows to be wrong - her lack of calculation simply leads her to believe anything that occurs to her. Moll's impetuosity reveals a strange kind of unworldliness which contrasts sharply with the picaresque's worldliness. Rather as some people may be colour-blind, or tone-deaf, Moll seems morally insensitive. She does not understand her incest morally, but emotionally, and she does not understand her crimes morally. Yet neither is she wholly materialist and calculating. Her emotional life is the most significant feature of her experience, and her reliance upon it is a wholly different kind of innocence from anything we have encountered in the picaresque novel.

The worldliness of her fellow-prisoners is made obvious when Moll is advised to lay out a few bribes. She is advised that by lining a few pockets, her sentence may be commuted, and realises that money is a more efficient and immediate way of securing mercy than prayer. As her Tutor says, 'did you ever know one in your Life that was Transported, and had a Hundred Pound in his Pocket' (MF, p. 294). Moll accepts his advice, and so reveals to us the degree to which her conversion is self-seeking. It is adopted as a convenient means to escape hardship; it is not a profound moral experience. As soon as an easier, or more immediate, avenue of escape is proposed, the conversion is soon put aside.

It seems then that Moll's conversion might be wholly genuine as long as it lasts, for Moll is fully convinced by it. However, even if she is as whole-hearted as ever, her motivation is clearly self-interest, and the fact that she does not notice or mention this is one of the most characteristic features of her narrative. By laying out money, Moll is not only reprieved from death, she also gains a kind of conditional pardon.<sup>41</sup> Though she takes no major part in the bribery herself, she is certainly prepared to tolerate the intercessions of others on her behalf, and does

---

41. See MF, p. 293n.



not inquire at all into their methods. To us, the hypocrisy and self-deception seem glaring, but nothing is being presented to us with the intention of deceiving us. Moll disingenuously gives herself away time and again, and never seems intent upon taking us in. In this part of the book, we return to the explicit materialism of a world in which money opens all doors, but Moll herself remains blissfully naive. What we seem to have, then, is a kind of picaresque novel without a picaro as central character. Very few other characters within the book share Moll's innocence - no-one, for instance, is ever as romantic as she - and all the other characters seem much more worldly about everything. Though her continued success as a thief may lead us to doubt her innocence, she is never as ruthless, single-minded or aggressive as the picaro.

Moll's penitence soon passes. Once she has secured her release from Newgate, there are no signs that her behaviour has been significantly changed. When she sets up home in Virginia, she is perfectly prepared to live off the earnings of her criminal life, and even when she is reminded of her bigamous, incestuous state, she does very little about it. Her money ensures a good trip to Virginia, and by bribing the ship's captain, she and Jemmy are allowed their freedom. At this point, Moll reminds us of her alleged purpose in publishing her life story,.

AS the publishing this Account of  
my Life, is for the sake of the  
just Moral of every part of it, and  
for Instruction, Caution, Warning  
and Improvement to every Reader...  
(MF, p. 326)

What would the reader actually learn from a study of Moll's life? Not, surely, that penitence is a moral duty. Rather, the reader is shown that prudence is the best way of living, that romantic love and social origins are forces which disrupt the search for comfort, and that sometimes contrition is prudent. The world is shown to be mercenary and materialist, and Moll's innocence seems inappropriate, but also, and this is important, surprisingly successful.

Most critics who have discussed the unity or cohesion of the book have seen it as a consistent search, organised by Moll's characteristics. Terence Martin analyses the whole text in terms of Moll's thorough search to become a 'Gentlewoman'. Martin claims that Moll first tries to secure this end through marriage. When this fails, she turns to crime, and when crime fails she turns to penitence.<sup>42</sup> Martin's case is helped

---

42. Terence Martin, 'The Unity of Moll Flanders,' MLQ, XXII (1961), 115-124. Martin's argument is expanded in the articles by Koonce and Michie, referred to earlier.

by the recurrent references to gentility throughout the book, and if his argument is valid, then the book becomes largely ironic. Moll achieves what she wanted, but we realise how shabby a thing gentility actually is. However, it is possible to have reservations about Martin's description of the book. The ironies of Moll's position are obvious, and her character is consistently impulsive throughout, but the book never seems to be quite as carefully organised as Martin would have us believe. He pays little attention to the obtrusive incest episode, and deals only very sketchily with Moll's penitence. The second of these could be fitted into the view of the book as an extended irony, but the first seems less manageable. The book cannot simply be seen as a linear progress towards redemption - 'Moll's progress is not simply from fear to moral stupidity to repentance. Such a bald moral summary neglects the actual strategies of the narrative...'.<sup>43</sup> Just as with Crusoe, or Colonel Jack or Captain Singleton, the redemptive process is not a full description of the narrative, though it may be a partial one.

What remains to present grave problems to an ironic reading of the book is the significance of the incest episode. Indeed, it seems as though this episode presents problems for any consistent reading of the book. Even Novak's persuasive view of the book as an analysis of the ideas of Natural Law has to be emended to encompass Defoe's presentation of Moll's horror. Similarly, neither Martin nor Koonce nor Van Ghent have much to say about the interlude. Yet the episode remains, and is seen by Moll as a significant part of her history. The most plausible view of the event is that it reflects the inconsistency of Defoe's endeavour. Defoe is not simply trying to present us with a realistic view of the social world, in the sense defined at the end of Chapter Two. Rather, he is interested in the character of Moll herself, and is presenting her in a variety of situations to present her reactions. These situations are often similar to the world of the picaresque, but Moll moves through them as a narrator very different from the picaro. As has been said before, she is not concerned with dispelling our illusions about the world, as the picaro is, but with convincing us that her life has been justified and wholesome. Irony is not always applied or appropriate, and is certainly not applicable to the incest episode. However, Moll's lack of perceptiveness, her curious moral blindness, and her frequent lack of understanding of her own experiences are the sources of ironic treatment. By placing an innocent

---

43. Richetti, Defoe's Narrative, p. 139.

protagonist, though one who is innocent in an unusual way, in a hostile and frightening world, Defoe is presenting something rather different from the picaresque, and is evolving towards the novel of character.

Eventually, the book lacks coherence, and is thematically evasive. However, Moll's search can be best understood as a recurrent pursuit of stability and comfort. She is in a position where she is threatened by her own poverty, and by her emotional waywardness. The picaresque seeks stability (even if he fails to find it) by acuteness and cunning. For Moll, such clarity of vision is not an aid to comfort, but a threat to it. She never arrives at the picaresque's certainty, because that certainly would be hostile to her surprisingly sentimental view of family ties and emotional attachments. Moll's comparative prudishness shows her to be wilfully ignoring certain features of her own life, and elsewhere she is equally blind to the implications of her behaviour. Moll is far too frequently outwitted to be a convincing picaresque. She does become a very successful and notorious thief, but even then she sees herself as a victim rather than as a protagonist. By stressing Moll's prudishness, coyness and even sentimentality, we can avoid the very savage estimate of Moll given by Denis Donoghue,

What Defoe says about life, in Moll Flanders, is true, as far as it goes, but the book is based upon a set of terms which ignores two-thirds of human existence; these terms cancel all aspects of human consciousness to which the analogies of trade are irrelevant...As a result, the book cannot conceive of human action as genial, charitable, or selfless; hence it cannot survive comparison with a novel like Portrait of a Lady in which the enabling vision of life is wide, generous, answerable to human possibility. 44

By equating Defoe's views with Moll's, and by seeing Moll's as wholly mercenary, Donoghue dismisses the book as mercenary and squalid. We can avoid such a conclusion by two disagreements with Donoghue's description. The ironic detachment which is present, even if spasmodic and hard to define, allows us to separate Defoe and Moll. And by stressing Moll's

- 
44. Donoghue, 'The Values of Moll Flanders', p. 303. It is also worth asking whether a book must have this "enabling vision of life" to be worth reading. Donoghue must have little time for the picaresque novel.

proneness to 'that Cheat Call'd LOVE', we need not see the book as wholly mercenary.

How useful, then, are the terms 'realism' and 'picaresque' in a discussion of Moll Flanders? 'Realism' is only of limited use, since the book is certainly not a neutral presentation of a supposedly authoritative view of the world. Moll's obvious imperceptiveness means that her view of the world is not to be fully accepted. However, the book could still be realistic if we were aware of any fully consistent view which Defoe was offering as the corrective to Moll's - the kind of technique we have in Jaroslav Hasek's The Good Soldier Svejk, or even Candide, to an extent. There is no evidence that Defoe has such a fully comprehensive view which he is undertaking to establish. We saw in Crusoe that the confusion between Fortune and Providence were never annealed into the structure of the novel. In Moll, the confusions are Moll's, but they are never consistently corrected.

'Picaresque' is more helpful, even if only in default. Moll shares with the picaresque the sordid background of the protagonist and the search for stability. However, as we have seen, Moll herself is never identifiable as a picaro. She has neither the frankness nor the single-minded ruthlessness of the Spanish narrators. Her emotional life is both varied and haphazard, and her tribulations are often inflicted by this emotional life.

Consequently, the book is not wholly materialist, and its world includes such spiritual features as emotional attachments. In sociological terms, the world of the picaresque novel is Gesellschaft; the world of Moll is Gemeinschaft. The problem of family ties in a competitive world, and the degree to which they can be ignored in favour of self-assertion is a major theme in Defoe's last fiction, Roxana, to which we must now turn.

## CHAPTER SIX: ROXANA AND THE FAMILY

In the earlier discussion of both Crusoe and Moll, it has become apparent that neither book achieves real thematic concentration or organisation. Crusoe was diffuse, and wavered uncertainly between Fortune and Providence. Moll digressed, even if its digressions were comprehensible in terms of the narrator's opportunist and flitting character. Roxana: The Fortunate Mistress (1724) is significantly different from the early fiction, and deserves to be seen as Defoe's most organised and successful novel. It is certainly the most unified of all Defoe's novels, and for that reason it is the one which is most approachable by means of theme.

Despite this, Roxana has been relatively ignored by critics. In The Rise of the Novel, Ian Watt barely mentions Defoe's last novel. He recognises that it is different from the others - 'Colonel Jacque, Roxana and A Journal of the Plague Year all have some excellencies unrivalled elsewhere' (p. 98) - but he sees Moll as being the most interesting book to examine at length. His dismissal of Roxana is symptomatic of the way the book has been widely overlooked, and seems to be one of the greatest weaknesses of Watt's analysis. Similarly, none of the other writers who have written extensively on Defoe has given the book the attention it merits.<sup>1</sup> There are various reasons for this. For most of the nineteenth-century, the text of Roxana which was most widely available contained a spurious continuation of the narrative, which may well have been taken to be the genuine article.<sup>2</sup> Alternatively, the book may have been distasteful to some critics for its rather seedy preoccupations.<sup>3</sup> Whatever the case, this neglect of Roxana has not only meant that a very interesting book has been unfortunately ignored, it has also led to inadequate estimates of Defoe's art.

An indication of the greater gravity and solemnity of this last book is seen immediately on its title page. The title itself is an ironic reversal of Aphra Behn's The Unfortunate Mistress into The Fortunate Mistress.

- 
1. Though it has been relatively overlooked, Roxana has not been totally ignored. Much of the earlier work done upon it is summarised by Robert D. Hume, 'The Conclusion of Defoe's Roxana: Fiasco or Tour de Force?' Eighteenth-Century Studies, III (1969), 475-490.
  2. For a critic whose views of Roxana seem to depend on accepting the continuation as genuine, see F.W. Chandler, The Literature of Roguery (1907, reissued, New York, 1958).
  3. See, for instance, William P. Trent, Daniel Defoe: How to Know Him (Indianapolis, 1916), p. 217.



As we shall see, this title has two very different meanings. It could refer to Roxana's good fortune in maintaining her deceptions for so long, with such success, or it could ironically refer to the way her fortune catches up with her at the end.<sup>4</sup> The title also promises the reader a 'vast Variety of Fortunes', and the book concentrates very greatly on this word 'Fortunes' with its two meanings of fate and wealth. Defoe again poses as editor, and stresses again the authenticity of his reports,

this Story differs from most of the  
Modern Performances of this Kind, tho'  
some of them have met with a very  
good Reception in the World: I say,  
It differs from them in this Great  
and Essential Article, Namely,  
That the Foundation of This is  
laid in Truth of Fact; and so the  
Story is not a Story, but a History.  
(Rox, p.1)

When he refers to 'this Kind', he is referring to very different performances from Crusoe and Moll, each of which owed something to the literary background of travel tales, lives of pirates and criminal biographies.<sup>5</sup> Roxana is a contribution to the very different literary genre of the roman à clef, a literature of scandalous disclosure and gossip, retelling dirty deeds in high places, which was popular in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. As well as avowing authenticity, which is certainly contrasted with the unworthy fictions of Mrs. Manley and Mrs. Heywood, Defoe offers corroboration by being very precise about dates, places and identities, all designed to give the illusion of verisimilitude. As well as setting the tale in specific place and time, the editor claims to have knowledge of several of the participants. He claims to be 'particularly acquainted' with Roxana's first husband, and her father, and so he can personally vouchsafe the tale's accuracy. The reason for this extra effort at corroboration is that Defoe is trying much harder to impress upon his readers the truth of the work. In Roxana, he is being much more obviously didactic than in the earlier works. Whether he is didactic in the kind of materialist way that the picaresque was remains to be seen, but his last book is certainly much less concerned with adventure or character simply for their own sakes.

- 
4. The title page, of course, may not be Defoe's work. See Rodney M. Baine, 'The Evidence From Defoe's Title Pages,' Studies in Bibliography, XXV (1972), 185-191.
  5. For the most comprehensive discussion of these literary sub-cultures, in which Defoe was active throughout his life, see John J. Richetti, Popular Fiction Before Richardson: Narrative Patterns 1700-1739 (Oxford, 1969).

Neither Crusoe nor Moll fitted coherently into any scheme of punishment and reward, nor did they betray the simple thematic unity of the picaresque. The picaresque revelation of the world as competitive chaos was never fully embraced by either book. In Roxana, the theme is much more consistently carried out, and bears interesting similarities to the picaresque. The world through which Roxana moves is pervasively corrupted, from the lowest to the highest, but into this corrupt world, Defoe introduces a much graver moral view;<sup>6</sup>

It is true, she met with unexpected  
Success in all her wicked Courses;  
but even in the highest Elevations  
of her Prosperity, she makes frequent  
Acknowledgments, That the Pleasure  
of her Wickedness was not worth the  
Repentance; and that all the Satisfaction  
she had, all the Joy in the View of  
her Prosperity, no, nor all the Wealth  
she rowl'd in; the Gayety of her  
Appearance; the Equipages, and the  
Honours, she was attended with, cou'd  
quiet her Mind, abate the reproaches  
of her Conscience, or procure her an  
Hour's Sleep, when just Reflections  
kept her waking.

(Rox, p. 2)

Roxana's position as narrator is thus very different from Crusoe's or Moll's. Crusoe could look back over his past with some complacency and satisfaction, confident that his eventual comfort justified his exercises. He described his eventual state as one of 'complicated good Fortune' (RC, p. 304). and his retrospective view was never sombre. Moll's parting words, after she had explained to her current husband about her incestuous marriage, were 'all these little Difficulties were made easy, and we liv'd together with the greatest Kindness and Comfort imaginable' (MF, p. 342). Defoe's other narrators all leave us after they have achieved a position of relative felicity. The ending of Captain Singleton is strikingly complacent,

And now, having so plainly told you,  
that I am come to England, after I  
have so boldly own'd what Life I  
have led abroad, 'tis Time to leave  
off, and say no more for the present,  
lest some should be willing to  
inquire too nicely after

Your Old Friend,  
CAPTAIN BOB  
(CS, p. 277)

- 
6. Roxana's court surroundings would have much greater contemporary relevance for Defoe's readers. Though the story is ostensibly set in the court of Charles II, internal evidence reveals a much later date, confirming Defoe's repeated view that his own age was repeating the licentiousness of the Caroline reign. See Rodney M. Baine, 'Roxana's Georgian Setting,' SEL, XV (1974), 459-473.

There are no signs here of any genuine reproachfulness for a criminal career which is extensive and energetically carried out. Bob's only worry is that he might be apprehended, but even the publication of his memoirs is taken as an occasion for bravura self-advertisement. The ending of Colonel Jack draws an interesting distinction, worth quoting in full,

I had, as I said, leisure to reflect, and to repent, to call to mind things pass'd, and with a just detestation, learn as Job says, to abhor my self in Dust and Ashes.

IT is with this Temper that I have written my Story, I would have all that design to read it, prepare to do so with the Temper of Penitents; and remember with how much Advantage they may make their penitent Reflections at Home, under the merciful Dispositions of Providence in Peace, Plenty, and Ease, rather than Abroad under the Discipline of a Transported Criminal as my Wife and my Tutor, or under the Miseries and distresses of a Shipwreck'd wanderer, as my Skipper or Captain of the Sloop, who as I had dyed a very great Penitent...or in Exile, however favourably circumstanced as mine, in absence from my Family, and for some time in no possible View of ever seeing them any more.

SUCH I say, may repent with Advantage, but how few are there that seriously look in, till their way is hedg'd up, and they have no other way to look?

(CJ, pp. 308-9)

There are two points of importance here. One is Jack's stress upon how hazardous and imperilling life is for all of Defoe's narrators, including even the extreme jeopardy of damnation which he hints at in the last paragraph. Secondly, there is the suggestion that this state of being 'hedg'd up' is very rare, and that most people have leisure to repent more casually, just as Moll and Crusoe claimed to.

Such a distinction between comfortable living and the extreme jeopardy of the narrator is much closer to the picaresque. At the end of the picaresque, the narrator was still in danger, yet was neither in a condition to repent nor even aware of the possibilities of repentance. At the end of El Buscón, for instance, the narrator hinted only at the slightest possibility of change, but held out little hope for improvement in his own case:

and therefore with the Advice of my  
Doxy Grajales, I resolved to go to  
the West-Indies, taking her along  
with me to try whether I could meet  
with better Fortune in another  
Country, but it prov'd worse; for  
they never mend their Condition,  
who only change places without  
mending their Life and Manners. 7

The pessimism expressed here, the view that only a material benefit is possible, and that even that will be withheld from the narrator, becomes more striking in Roxana. Only in his last work of fiction does Defoe develop the pessimism of the picaresque, and of the conclusion of Jack. It is very important to notice, however, that he does not adopt any of the pizaro's ebullience or energy, and that his heroine indulges in much more self-recrimination than any pizaro. Unlike the earlier novels, the ending does not offer an easily achieved penitence. The heroine is now placed in the direst jeopardy, as a result both of economic urgency and personal vanity. It is the stress on economic urgency which likens this book most to the picaresque, and to the darker world within Moll, where bribery and corruption were almost universal.

The first obvious feature of the pizaro was the instability and penury of his background. We saw too, that in Crusoe and Moll, the narrator's background was neither fully stable nor wholly congenial. The backgrounds of Defoe's figures were certainly less hostile than those of the pizaro, but they were still typified by estrangement and disruption. Roxana also has an unsuitable and estranging background. Like Crusoe, her family is of foreign descent, but this is more disruptive in her case as she herself has been brought to England as a refugee from the persecution of the Protestants, in 1683.<sup>8</sup> Unlike the other characters, though, Roxana comes from fairly comfortable and genteel parentage. Her early education is scrupulous, and is designed to make her suited to a life of quality,

I was (speaking of myself as about  
Fourteen Years of Age) tall, and very  
well made, sharp as a Hawk in Matters  
of common Knowledge; quick and smart  
in Discourse; apt to be Satyrical; full  
of Repartee, and a little too forward  
on Conversation; or as we call it in  
English, BOLD, tho' perfectly Modest  
in my Behaviour. Being French Born,

- 
7. The Comical Works of Don Francisco de Quevedo, pp. 346-7.
  8. The year 1683 seems to be a significant one in Defoe's fiction. As well as being the date of Roxana's arrival in England, it is also the date of composition given at the end of Moll, and the year in which Singleton is born. There seems to be no obvious reason for this emphasis, though 1683 is thought to be the year Defoe set himself up in the hosiery business, and the year in which he first courted his wife, Mary Tufflev.

I danc'd, as some say, naturally,  
lov'd it extremely, and sung well  
also, and so well, that, as you  
shall hear, it was afterwards some  
Advantage to me: with all these  
Things, I wanted neither wit, Beauty,  
or Money. In this Manner I set out  
into the world, having all the  
Advantages that any young woman  
cou'd desire, to recommend me to  
others, and form a Prospect of  
happy Living to myself.

(Rox, pp. 6-7)

Of course, this 'happy Living' never arrives. Despite all Roxana's social, economic and personal advantages, she suffers the sorriest fate of all Defoe's narrators.

The book, then, follows the career of someone initially prosperous, who later declines into misery. Elsewhere, Defoe remarks on the surprise engendered by those of good, apparently stable, backgrounds who turn to evil and corruption. In his account of a notorious pirate, Major Stede Bonnet, Defoe wonders why such a man should fall into wicked ways,

The Major was a Gentleman of good Reputation in the Bazbadoes, was Master of a plentiful Fortune, and had the Advantage of a liberal Education. He had the least Temptation of any Man to follow such a Course of Life, from the Condition of his Circumstances. It was very surprizing to every one, to hear of the Major's Enterprize, in the Island where he liv'd; and as he was generally esteem'd and honour'd, before he broke out into open Acts of Pyracry, so he was afterwards rather pity'd than condemned, by those that were acquainted with him, believing that his Humour of going a Pyrating, proceeded from a Disorder in his Mind. 9

The idea of the motivational 'Disorder of the Mind' recalls Crusoe's 'Inclination'. Both are rather perplexed attempts at the explanation of puzzling behaviour, and neither seems relevant to Roxana's case. However, the description of Major Stede Bonnet goes on to claim that his behaviour was brought about 'by some Discomforts he found in a married State' (*ibid.*). This splendidly casual remark, which could apply to almost everyone, hero or heroine, in European fiction, seems nearer to Roxana's

---

9. A General History of the Pyrates (1724), ed. Manuel Schonhorn (London, 1972), p. 95.



170

experience. It is worth remembering that the life of Stede Bonnet was written in the same year as Roxana, and her discomforts too seem to arise from matrimonial causes rather than from psychological ones.

We already know, from Roxana's flight from France, that sudden strokes of Fortune can disrupt even the most ordered of lives. We know too that Defoe saw the role of the evil woman as very important in the corruption of such eminent rogues as Jack Sheppard and Jonathan Wild.<sup>10</sup> Roxana's problem, as she sees it, is that she is arranged in marriage to a fool, and thus made destitute. The book then goes on to show how little use her genteel training is as education for a world revealed to be harsh, competitive and mercenary. In this cruel world, Roxana's background is of little assistance. By being deprived of a trade, she has nothing to rely upon, and is forced into deception by the lack of alternative means of survival. In The Complete English Tradesman (1725), Defoe discussed the importance of trade in a way which is very interesting in this context.

Trade is not a ball, where people appear in masque, and act a part to make sport; where they strive to seem what they really are not, and to think themselves best dressed when they are least known. But tis a plain visible scene of honest life, shewn best in its native appearance, without disguise; supported by prudence and frugality...<sup>11</sup>

These references to masques and disguise describe the later career of Roxana. Defoe seems to be drawing a clear distinction between proper, honest behaviour and shady deceptions. By being trained as she is, Roxana has no recourse but deception.

To understand the twin themes of the book, marriage and disguise, it may be worth remembering Roxana's name and nationality. Though her name is conferred on her well into the book, and is only known to a few participants in the novel, it is the name by which the reader is introduced to the heroine. The original Roxana was a concubine of Alexander the Great, and would have been familiar to Defoe's readers, if at all,

- 
10. See The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard (1724) and The Life and Actions of Jonathan Wild (1725), in Romances and Narratives of Daniel Defoe, ed. G.A. Aitken (London, 1895), XVI, 180, 244.
  11. The Complete English Tradesman (London, 1725), p. 117 Quoted in Laura Ann Curtis (ed.), The Versatile Defoe (London, 1979), pp. 378-9.

only through Nathaniel Lee's The Rival Queens (1677). However, the association with corruption is reinforced by the meanings of 'rox' or 'roxy'. The OED gives 'rox' as an intransitive verb, meaning 'to decay, soften or slacken', and gives a quotation for 'roxy' which defines it as 'signifying fruit beginning to decay'. 'Roxana', then, is one on the point of decay, and is another indication that the names of Defoe's characters may often have emblematic significance.

It is also worth remembering that Roxana is originally French. In The True Born Englishman, Defoe describes the characteristic vice of the French as being ungovernable passion,

Ungovern'd Passion settled first in France,  
Where Mankind lives in haste, and thrives by  
Chance.

A Dancing Nation, Fickle and Untrue:  
Have oft undone themselves, and others too..<sup>12</sup>

Given the stress on Roxana's abilities as a dancer, we have here an indication of her eventual fate which is accurate.

Roxana fits in with Defoe's preoccupation with marriage in his writings around 1724, and becomes an analysis of the fate of a naturally passionate and fickle character, who is badly married as a young girl. It is tempting to see the book as a didactic tract, offering the same kind of warnings about marriage as Religious Courtship (1722), but, as with Moll Flanders, Defoe's interest here is more with character than with issue.

As in Moll Flanders, too, this later book is dominated by the proverb 'Give me not Poverty, lest I steal'. The occasion of Roxana's fall into poverty is her first marriage, and she starts lamenting her fate as soon as she mentions her husband,

After I have told you that he was  
A Handsome Man, and a good Sportsman,  
I have, indeed, said all; and  
unhappy was I, like other young  
People of our Sex, I chose him  
for being a handsome, jolly Fellow,  
as I have said; for he was otherwise  
a weak, empty-headed, untaught  
Creature, as any Woman could ever  
desire to be coupled with: And  
here I must take the Liberty,  
Whatever I have to reproach  
myself with in my after-Conduct,  
to turn to me Fellow-Creatures  
the Young Ladies of this Country,  
and speak to them, by way of  
Precaution

(Rox, pp. 7-8)

Notice here how much more seriously Roxana reviews her life than Moll did. The later narrator slips easily into reflection, and this

---

12. The True Born Englishman (1701), in Selected Poetry and Prose of Daniel Defoe, ed. Michael F. Shugrue (New York, 1968), p. 46.

invariably leads to didactic self-recrimination. Unlike Crusoe, Moll, and the picaresque novel, Roxana is clearly admonitory in the main. The heroine's life is not presented for emulation, but for avoidance. In this case, Defoe is recalling the dangers of a marriage based upon physical attraction, just as he does in The Review and in Religious Courtship.

Roxana's first husband turns out to be a feeble and wholly incompetent businessman. As soon as his father dies, he brings about the failure of his business. Eventually, after seven years of marriage, he abandons Roxana, with their five children, and a total wealth of only £70. She spares us no details in her descriptions of this man's foolishness, and from what we know of the eighteenth-century brewing industry, he must have been particularly incompetent to fail in this trade.<sup>13</sup> What is most interesting in Roxana's account of her marriage is her emphasis on her own innocence. She presents the actual marriage itself as something beyond her control - 'my Father gave me...25000Livres...and married me to an Eminent Brewer' (Rox, p. 7). This sense of herself as a commodity to be bestowed by her father is maintained in her passivity during the marriage itself, which contrasts greatly with the adventurousness of her later behaviour.

Roxana's recollection of what she sees as her innocence and mistreatment is passionately re-iterated in the denunciation of her husband. However, it would be misleading to see this book as a picaresque, and to see the first marriage as the disabusing factor, turning the heroine towards ruthlessness. Roxana is certainly much more single-minded in her pursuit of comfort than Crusoe or Moll, and yet she seems to go even further than is strictly necessary. After she has been abandoned by her husband, she is given the opportunity to discover the truly cruel nature of the social world. Stranded with the children, and greatly encumbered by them, she considers various schemes to rid herself of them. The only suitable way out is to entrust them to a relative, whose husband gives a very interesting economic justification for this charity:

---

13. Though the various government measures to curb the consumption of gin by promoting local breweries were not until later in the century, the early eighteenth-century brewing industry seems to have been remarkably successful. See M. Dorothy George, London Life in the Eighteenth Century (new ed., Harmondsworth, 1965), chapter six.

Charity is a Duty to the Poor,  
 and he that gives to the Poor, lends  
 to the Lord; let us lend our  
 Children's Bread, as you call it  
 it will be a Store well laid up  
 for them...I only talk of putting  
 out a little Money to Interest,  
 our Maker is a good Borrower,  
 never fear making a bad Debt there...

(Rox, pp. 22-3)

This sense of the pervasiveness of the balance-sheet, and of an overseeing deity who tallies things up is a remarkable change from the central confusions of Crusoe and Moll. In the earlier books, evil was not necessarily punished, nor virtue necessarily rewarded. Before we can see how authoritative the relative's words are, we have to examine the nature of Roxana's sin, and the degree of her culpability.

As with Moll, Roxana falls into her first crimes purely through poverty and need. All Roxana has been trained for is marriage, and without that she can only secure a sufficiency by means of prostitution. Initially, she rejects this as a possible solution. Her maid Amy suggests that, when faced with the likelihood of starvation, prostitution becomes an acceptable way out. Roxana, however, denounces such an overtly picaresque understanding of the situation,

Hitherto I had not only preserv'd  
 the Virtue itself, but the virtuous  
 Inclination and Resolution; and had  
 I kept myself there, I had been  
 happy, tho' I had perish'd of meer  
 Hunger; for, without question, a  
 Woman ought rather to die, then  
 to prostitute her Virtue and Honour,  
 let the Temptation be what it will.

(Rox, p. 29)

Retrospectively, Roxana returns to her first view, and assesses her life in such moral terms. She concludes that early in life she made a disastrous error. A lengthy debate follows the quoted passage, concerning whether Roxana should give in to her landlord. Sleeping with him would certainly be to Roxana's economic advantage, and a picaresque would need to spend little time discussing the matter. Roxana, however, is still possessed of moral scruple, and finds the idea of selling herself repugnant.

During the debate over whoring, Amy takes the view that if the act is absolutely necessary, then it must be justifiable. We have already seen the exculpatory role of necessity in Moll, and Novak has shown that throughout Defoe the plea is accepted as a method of extenuation. However, the plea is not universally acceptable, even for Defoe.

In An Appeal to Honour and Justice (1715), he dismisses the appeal to necessity roundly,

Necessity is pleaded by both Parties for doing things which neither Side can justify. I wish both Sides would ever avoid the Necessity of doing Evil; for certainly it is the worst Plea in the World, and generally made use of for the worst Things. 14

In retrospect, Roxana seems to agree with Defoe's 1715 view. However, like Crusoe on finding the gold, there is a suspicion that she protests too much, and it has been argued that Defoe would have supported Amy's view, as long as the necessity was genuine.<sup>15</sup> Once again Roxana's view of her own life is not necessarily offered for the reader's whole-hearted acceptance. Just as Moll is too generous in her estimate of herself, Roxana may be too severe.

The retrospective Roxana's deep and powerfully described penitence affects the process of the entire narrative. Her great severity about her possible act of adultery (though she does not know whether her husband is alive or dead) leads her to see Amy as 'a Viper, and Engine of the Devil' (Rox, p. 38). Such savage outbursts show us the essential difference between Roxana and the other narrators. Unlike them, she originally acts in the belief that she is acting wrongly.<sup>16</sup> Moll and Crusoe were never placed in any analogous moral dilemma. Crusoe was overcome by his 'wandering Disposition'; Moll acted from what she saw as pardonable necessity, and never fully assessed her moral position. Roxana's much more stringent moral view, which is a consequence of her religious upbringing, leads her to see herself as sinning, and so leads to the guilt and misery from which she suffers. It is worth noticing that no picaro ever suffers from this kind of guilt.<sup>17</sup> As Roxana puts it herself, 'I was a Double Offender...for I was resolv'd to commit the Crime, knowing and owning it to be a Crime' (Rox, p. 41). Her closeted family background has only given over-severe concepts with which to understand her behaviour, and so has brought her to be very absolute. After she has committed this

- 
14. An Appeal to Honour and Justice. in Selected Writings of Daniel Defoe, ed. James T. Boulton (Cambridge, 1975), pp. 186-7.
  15. See M.E. Novak, Defoe and the Nature of Man, p. 82.
  16. She has much contemporary justification for her view. For a discussion of the Puritan understanding of the permanence of marriage, see Stone, op. cit., p. 34.
  17. This point is made by M.E. Novak, 'Crime and Punishment in Roxana', JEGP, LXV (1966), 445-465.



175

relatively inoffensive act, she sees herself as having forsaken 'all Sence of Religion, and Duty to God, all Regard to Virtue and Honour' (Rox, p. 43).

The treatment of this episode has been so extended because of its great importance to the shape of the book. Roxana's personality, and partial misconception of her own life, are the twin features which dominate the narrative. Her continuous sustained self-recrimination is what makes this book so different from both Crusoe and Moll. Yet it is very important to notice that the episode in which her self-recrimination is established is one in which she seems to over-react and to misinterpret her own experience. The consequences of her moral sense are very grave indeed. Having, as she thinks, forsaken all morality, she feels wholly abandoned. This leads her to act recklessly, and brings out the paradox that Defoe's most moral narrator is the one who acts most wickedly. Once she has committed her initial sin, she feels no compunction in involving others in her downfall. This is most clearly seen when she puts Amy to bed with her own lover, the landlord. By this point in the narrative, the roles of Amy and Roxana have become reversed. Instead of Amy explaining the justifiability of prostitution to the sceptical and devout Roxana, Roxana dissolutely encourages Amy to join her in her own wickedness. There is even a debate between the two, where Amy is recalcitrant, and Roxana boldly takes the initiative - '...then I threw open the Bed, and thrust her in' (Rox, p. 46).

The newly aggressive and coercive Roxana makes a startling contrast to the earlier passive wife. How is the change to be explained? Many critics see it as psychologically implausible, but emblematically effective. G.A. Starr sums up the problem by claiming that 'Defoe regards his heroine as a damned soul. On the other hand, his imaginative oneness with her often seems virtually complete, and at such times we too may be drawn into a kind of complicity with her.'<sup>18</sup> David Blewett takes a very different view, and argues that we detect Roxana's evil in the way she disrupts the social order advocated in Defoe's non-fiction, by elevating Amy to the position of an equal.<sup>19</sup> Neither of these analyses seems completely satisfactory. The problem is not that Roxana is evil, yet the subject of 'imaginative oneness', or that we must find ways of

---

18. Defoe and Casuistry, p. 165.

19. David Blewett, Defoe's Art of Fiction (Toronto, 1979), pp. 116-120.

explaining her evil, but that she herself thinks she is evil. We, as readers, are entitled to see her actions differently. In this book, Defoe is examining the actions which arise from the conviction that one is already damned.

If this is true, then we are not imaginatively at one with Roxana, but distanced from her. In other novels, the moment when the narrator comes close to falling into inexcusable crime is carefully announced. For example, the criminal career of Colonel Jack is brought abruptly to a halt by his sense of the limits to what is tolerable. After robbing an old woman whose condition is as bad as his own, he feels stirrings of conscience, and feels he is betraying his own standards,

BUT my Heart was full of the poor  
Woman's Case at Kentish Town, and  
I resolv'd, if possible to find her  
out, and give her her Money:  
With the abhorrence that fill'd  
my Mind at the Cruelty of the Act,  
there necessarily follow'd a little  
Distaste of the Thing it self, and  
now it came into my Head with a  
double force, that this was the  
High Road to the Devil, and that  
certainly this was not the Life of  
a Gentleman.

(CJ, p. 67)

Jack's sense of himself as a gentleman is the product of his upbringing, and it saves him from going too far as a criminal. In the other books, the narrators receive some overt kind of warning - there are thunderclaps in Singleton and Serious Reflections, the death sentence in Moll and the banishment to the island in Crusoe. In Roxana, however, the narrator's warning comes right at the beginning of the book. She does not ignore it. Indeed it would be fairer to say that it makes a bigger impression on her than on any of the other figures. However, her inbred sense of gentility is so affronted by her new status, that she topples over into thinking of herself as wholly lost.

Rightly or wrongly, each of the other narrators recognises the warning as an indication of their possible redemption. Roxana sees her enforced decision to sleep with her landlord, despite his being married to someone else, as the outrageous act which puts her beyond all possibilities of redemption. It seems possible to suggest that by selecting an act which seems forgivable or excusable, Defoe is allowing us to withhold assent from Roxana's interpretation. After all, Moll behaved in very much the same way, without agonising, and came to no harm as a result.

Why then should Roxana suffer for such an act? She certainly feels that she is now completely depraved, and her casually gratuitous corruption of Amy only confirms her sense of desolation. It may be paradoxical, but it is true that Roxana is the most public of Defoe's characters, and the only one with a long-lasting confidante, but yet she is simultaneously the most private and most isolated.

Roxana makes constant references to the unhappiness and misery which keeps breaking in upon her. She sees it as being unprovoked, but at the same time inevitable,

We liv'd as merrily, and as happily after this, as cou'd be expected, considering our Circumstances; I mean as to the pretended Marriage, &c. and as to that, my Gentleman had not the least Concern about him for it; but as much as I was harden'd, and that was as much, as I believe, ever any wicked Creature was, yet I could not help it; there was, and would be, Hours of Intervals, and of Dark Reflections which came involuntarily in, and thrust in Sighs into the middle of all my Songs; and there would be, sometimes, a heaviness of Heart, which intermingl'd itself with all my Joy, and which would often fetch a Tear from my Eye; and let others pretend what they will, I believe it impossible to be otherwise with any body; there can be no substantial Satisfaction in a Life of known Wickedness; Conscience will, and does, often break in upon them at particular times, let them do what they can to prevent it.

(Rox, pp. 48-9)

We will remember that Moll lived a life of comparable wickedness with few such pangs recorded. Singleton lived a life of much greater wickedness, with no recorded sighing. Jack may suffer remorse, but only when he betrays his own standards of gentlemanly behaviour. So Roxana's claim about the inevitable misery of a wicked life is obviously inaccurate. However, the emphasis is on 'a Life of known Wickedness'. This does not mean public knowledge, for Moll's wickedness is widely known, and Roxana's is well concealed. Rather it means some internal knowledge, some sense of personal failing. Though others can blithely be wicked, Roxana cannot, and this is convincing evidence for claiming that it is Roxana's sense of guilt, rather than her actual guilt, which organises the narrative. The pervasiveness of her guilt is even apparent in the phrase about how the

'dark Reflections' are 'thrust in' upon her. The phrase 'thrust in' is a direct echo of the scene where Amy is put to bed with the landlord, and may show Roxana being unable to forget it, even if we see Amy as a willing accomplice.

The sense of recurrent jeopardy which this guilt entails is confirmed by Roxana's next adventure. Her sense of imminent destruction is borne out when her lover is required to go to Versailles with a bill. He discusses their mutual financial state before leaving, and despite the comfort which he offers, Roxana is overcome with forebodings. She even seems to have some kind of second-sight, foreseeing the murder of the landlord. Second sight, and various other kinds of prophecy and prediction, appear in many other Defoe pieces. Mention has already been made of The British Visions, and in The Life of Duncan Campbell (1720), Defoe offered an analysis of the whole field of seers and visionaries. In that book, he made a number of slyly ironic remarks about how Campbell could have the reputation of a famous seer, yet could still be unable to make any accurate predictions about the course of his own life.<sup>20</sup> However, in the main, Defoe seems to have treated the supernatural seriously and sympathetically.<sup>21</sup> Even if he was caustic about the profusion of astrologers who sprang up during the plague, he was equally fervent about Crusoe's prophetic dreams. However hard it might be to detect Defoe's own views behind his various impersonations, Roxana's belief in her vision is dramatically confirmed. This is a much more emphatic hint that there is some form of Providential intrusion into the world, and that Roxana is truly damned. Novak makes the point that Defoe believed in man's natural propensity towards evil.<sup>22</sup> Such a view would certainly be consistent with Roxana's apprehensions about her own sinfulness, and, even if over-stated, her propensity to evil, and its attendant horror form the central interest of the narrative.

By the death of her lover, Roxana is left wealthy, and she is thus removed from all economic necessities. The thought of herself as a rich, celebrated widow soon dries her tears for him, and not much later she is being courted by a prince. At this point, she begins to see that the forces impelling her corruption are her own characteristics rather than

---

20. Romances and Narratives of Defoe, ed. Aitken, IV, 144.

21. This issue is dealt with most thoroughly by Rodney M. Baine, Defoe and the Supernatural (Athens, George, 1968).

22. Novak, 'Crime and Punishment in Roxana, ' p. 447.

any possible external factors. As she says,

I have given you the whole Detail  
of this Story, to lay it down as a  
Scheme of the Way how Unhappy Women  
are ruin'd by Great Men; for tho'  
Poverty and Want is an irresistible  
Temptation to the Poor, Vanity and  
Great Things are as irresistible to  
others...

(Rox, p. 64)

The sense that she is brought down by her own vanity is developed all through her romantic interlude with the Prince. She does still talk of the Devil, and of the supernatural, but these are given more psychological than theological significance. She returns to a more religious sense of things when, established as the prince's mistress, she (briefly) convinces herself of the acceptability of her affair. She describes the oddity of her own case, of being so calm amidst so much sin,

I have, I confess, wonder'd at the  
Stupidity that my Intellectual Part  
was under all that while; what  
Lethargick Fumes doz'd in the Soul;  
and how it was possible that I, who  
in the Case before, where Temptation  
was many Ways more forcible, and the  
Arguments stronger, and more  
irresistible, was yet under a  
continued Inquietude on account  
of the wicked Life I led, could  
now live in the most profound  
Tranquility, and with an uninterrupted  
Peace, nay, even rising up to  
Satisfaction, and Joy, and yet in  
a more palpable State of Adultery  
than before...

(Rox, p. 69-70)

What she makes clear here is the implicit contradiction in her retrospective moral views. She has claimed that it is impossible to live contentedly in a life of known wickedness, yet is faced with her own lack of unease at adultery. One of the great strengths of this book, just as with Moll, is its careful delineation of complex states of mind. Defoe's handling of rationalisation and mental conflict is most assured in Roxana, and forces the reader to consider what must have happened for the narrator's view to have darkened so considerably.

The inconsistency between Roxana's retrospective view of events and her contemporary view of them is not simply a failure of technique on Defoe's part. There are a number of such oversights in Roxana, just as there were in Crusoe and Moll. The inaccuracy of the title page is obvious,



since Roxana could only have been twelve years old when Charles II died in 1685, and there are a number of similar discrepancies can be found.<sup>23</sup> However's Roxana's failure to understand her past experience is a different kind of inconsistency, and is certainly Roxana's error, not Defoe's. Roxana is a much more fundamentally ironic work than even Moll, and its whole narrative strategy is different from that found in the picaresque. Roxana is ironic in that throughout the book we are made aware of much more than the narrator is, and we are placed in a position to see her failings more readily than she can. In the main body of the text, we are unaware of the reason for Roxana's despair. We see that the events for which she castigates herself so severely are often to her own good, and certainly less evil than she wants us to believe. We see her world as being competitive, mercenary and widely corrupt, but she intrudes into that world a series of stringent moral principles which seem remarkably inappropriate. She even admits that these may be over-strict, by admitting that her wickedness was a source of pleasure to her.

This kind of irony has been partly discussed by a number of critics. John J. Richetti claims that Roxana is 'an ironist who is aware of those two levels of reality: the public image and the private fact, or the social mask and the natural reality'.<sup>24</sup> He goes on to say that Roxana remains constant throughout the narrative, as do all of Defoe's narrators, and that her 'pretence is that the "natural" self is discovered rather than acquired, an innate rather than a historical entity'.<sup>25</sup> There is much of value in what Richetti has to say. He is right on the mark when he identifies the conflict between public image and private fact, which is the book's central distinction. However, his discussion of the "natural" self is difficult to follow. It is certainly true that as an individual, Roxana arrives more fully formed than any of the others. For that reason, she sees herself as a separate entity, to whom events happen, rather than as a developing consciousness which is modified as the events unfold. She presents herself rather as Macbeth can be seen, as one who discovers her own evil, and is then helpless to cope with it. However, it is still very important to notice how Roxana's discovered self, or at least her

---

23. Such errors are discussed by James, Defoe's Many Voices, pp. 231-2

24. Defoe's Narratives: Situations and Structures, p. 198.

25. Op. cit., p. 199.

discovered fate, dominates the book. The retrospection in Roxana is of a strategically more important kind than the retrospection in Crusoe and Moll. In them the narrator was attempting to impose upon or discover within his life some pattern of providential planning. However, in the process of narration, this was often overlooked or just forgotten, and events took on their own momentum. Consequently, the books contained much that contradicted the avowed providential pattern. Roxana, on the other hand, is much more solemn and committed in her attempts to evolve a pattern. She sees her life as a simultaneous moral descent and social ascent, and tries to comprehend the relationship between such misery and such success. She claims that all wickedness must be attended with misery, which is a denial of the social world of the book in terms of the spiritual world. When the appropriate misery is not detectable, as in her affair with the prince, she has to worry about the inconsistency. Thus, though all the works betray such inconsistencies, Roxana is the only one of the narrators to notice them.

In all the books, then, we are separated from the narrator's view of the world. In Crusoe and Moll, this separation arises from an uncertainty in handling the narrative voice (more noticeable in the earlier of the two works). The narrator presents an analysis of his life which our access to that life confutes. On occasions, the narrator's lack of perception is rendered ironic - Crusoe not mentioning his father's gout, selling Xury, denouncing the money; Moll's desire to be a gentlewoman, her eventual complacency. Largely, though, the split between the experience and the understanding of it is left uneasily free of comment, and it is difficult to assess Defoe's intentions. In Roxana, however, we find a much more assured understanding of the narrator's limitations as commentator. This separation of views means that we have to be very careful of calling Defoe's work realistic. Unlike the technique of the realistic work, it seems as though Defoe's narrators are not to be taken as authentic reporters of the world. In the picaresque novel, there was never any doubt that the characters were reporting not only their view of the world, but also that their view was incorrigible. Defoe's essential difference from the picaresque lies in the imperceptiveness of his narrators, especially in the imperceptiveness of Roxana.

Roxana's conscience is a much more powerful voice than is either Crusoe's or Moll's. She worries rather more about the fate of her bastard children than does Moll, but this does not prevent her from continuing

to live as the prince's mistress, and to live pleasureably. We are left in no doubt that the prince is a well-known man of pleasure. We are told that he has several mistresses and that he can cope comfortably with their pregnancies (Rox, p. 76). All this is mere speculation on Roxana's part, and she does seem strikingly unworldly in all her relations with the prince. However, Roxana curiously denounces herself as the wicked one, and even sees herself as the cause of his sins,

such is the Power of a vicious Inclination;  
Whoring was, in a Word, his Darling Crime;  
the worst Excursion he made; for he was  
otherwise, one of the most excellent  
Persons in the World; no Passions; no  
furious Excursions; no ostentatious  
Pride; the most humble, courteous,  
affable Person in the World; not an  
Oath; not an indecent Word, or the  
least Blemish in Behaviour, was to be  
seen in all his Conversation, except as  
before excepted; and it has given me  
Occasion for many dark Reflections since;  
to look back and think, that I should  
be the Snare of such a Person's Life;  
that I should influence him to so much  
Wickedness; and that I should be the  
Instrument in the Hand of the Devil, to  
do him so much Prejudice.

(Rox, p. 102)

The extraordinary transition within this passage from seeing the prince as an accomplished rake and libertine to seeing him as an innocent, snared by the infernal talents of Roxana, is remarkably compressed. It shows Roxana's conception of herself as a powerful agent of evil, able to corrupt otherwise innocent souls. Surely this is an excessive and inaccurate conception. Roxana previously thought she had corrupted Amy, though Amy seemed a very eager accomplice. Now the prince seems a very unlikely victim. If he is indeed given to whoring, then Roxana is merely the expression of his vice, not the cause of it. Her blatant misunderstanding of his character, and of her role in his life, must raise doubts about her reliability as a commentator elsewhere.

In the next few episodes, we begin to understand more fully the value of money, and the mercenary nature of the world. The prince repents, conscious of having betrayed his worthy wife, now dead. Roxana approves of his chivalrous conduct, but is unmoved by his religious penitence. She takes the opportunity to review her situation, and is struck by her comfortable financial position - 'not only well supplied, but Rich, and not only Rich, but was very Rich; in a word, richer than I knew how to think of' (Rox, p. 110). No longer, then, can she claim financial necessity as a

cause for her wickedness, but the fear of losing what wealth she has leads her into greater and greater deception. We see, as she does, that her position as a wealthy widow must be a dangerous one. The world she inhabits is too full of sharpers and rakes for her to be wholly honest. In this world, appearance is of paramount importance, and, like Moll, Roxana is forced to keep concealing the true nature of her financial position from suitors and lovers. Money is seen to be a necessary condition for worthwhile behaviour - the prince can behave nobly towards Roxana only because he can afford to conduct his departure from her in formal ways. However, as we see from Roxana herself, money is not a sufficient condition for worthy behaviour. We saw in an earlier passage that charity was looked upon by Roxana's relatives as being a kind of investment with guaranteed returns (Rox, pp. 22-3). Later in the book, we get a very precise idea of the market value of Roxana's own charms. All this goes to show that Roxana's world is, like the picaresque world, dominated by prices and purchases. Where Roxana seems to misunderstand it is <sup>in</sup> her continual emphases on values.

Once we have seen Roxana's new whole-hearted commitment to money, despite her retrospective rejection of it, we have the curious interlude of another storm-repentance. Like Crusoe's first repentance at sea, or Moll's in Newgate, this repentance arises more from fear than from abhorrence. Its place in the book is to enhance the understanding of Roxana's constant jeopardy. In a world like hers, her stability is bound to be precarious. She sees life as a constant battle, and now realises that death is an equally terrible threat. We thus have the beginning of the book's dual concentration upon mercantile dealings in the competitive world and spiritual concerns with the possible threat of death. The spiritual concerns are consistently seen as a threat rather than as a source of comfort. In Crusoe and Moll, the conflicts between the material and spiritual concerns of the narrator were never resolved, only ignored or misconceived. Such a combination of spiritual concern and careful practicality was also apparent in A Journal of the Plague Year, Colonel Jack and Captain Singleton. In the picaresque novel, there was no such conflict. The immediately pressing economic needs were all that mattered, and after an initial disillusionment, these needs could be satisfied by whatever cynicism and cruelty thought to be necessary. Defoe never goes as far towards cynicism as this. Certainly, in Roxana, he can be seen to be unimpressed by life in high places, and his cynicism is clearly greater than his heroine's. Roxana does become most scathing about honour, chivalry and gentility, but, like Moll, she always retains



something of her innocence. And always behind the cynicism there is a sense of foreboding about the spiritual side of life, even if that foreboding blinds the narrator to the observable features of her own life.<sup>26</sup>

Throughout her narrative, Roxana seeks a kind of tolerable independence, free from the constraints of both matrimony and poverty. The nearest that she has come to this is the life of the courtesan.<sup>27</sup> When she dresses as Roxana, and is so named, we know that the jewels adorning her costume are fake (Rox, p. 174). Her pursuit of liberty has thus become a deepening spiral of deception, disguise and fraud. She is now so enmeshed in deception that to defend her own position she has to resort to increasingly dangerous feats of subterfuge. One of the book's concerns, as we have seen, is to show that genuine honour is very rare indeed. In the later parts of the book, we see this confirmed with Roxana's ignoble attempts at both personal grandeur and personal safety. She becomes concerned with the meaning of 'honour' for someone in her situation, and says this,

It had for a-while been a little kind  
of Excuse to me, that I was engag'd  
with this wicked old Lord, and that I  
cou'd not, in Honour, forsake him;  
but how foolish and absurd did it  
look, to repeat the Word Honour on so  
vile an Occasion? As if a Woman shou'd  
prostitute her Honour in Point of  
Honour; horrid Inconsistency; Honour  
call'd upon me to detest the Crime  
and the Man too, and to have resisted  
all the Attacks which from the  
beginning had been made upon my  
Virtue; and Honour, had it been  
consulted, would have preserv'd  
me honest from the Beginning.

For HONESTY and HONOUR, are  
the same.  
This, however, shews us with what  
faint Excuses, and with what Trifles,  
we pretend to satisfie ourselves,  
and suppress the Attempts of

- 
26. Roxana's cynical views on marriage are discussed by James, Defoe's Many Voices, pp. 240-243. As he rightly points out, Roxana's first marriage is no less disastrous than Moll's incestuous one, yet it causes Roxana to reject marriage much more forcibly than Moll ever would. This is a case of Roxana's ungoverned passion winning out, as opposed to Moll's resilience.
27. The use of the name Roxana has already been discussed. See also Blewett, Defoe's Art of Fiction, pp. 122-4; Spiro Peterson, 'The Matrimonial Theme of Defoe's Roxana,' PMLA, LXX (1955), 166-191; and Everett Zimmerman, 'Language and Character in Defoe's Roxana,' EC, XXI (1971), 227-235.



Conscience in the Pursuit of agreeable Crime, and in the possessing those Pleasures we are loth to part with.

(Rox, pp. 201-2) 28

Notice here Roxana's acknowledgment that her conscience actually gave her very little trouble during the course of the affair. This again confutes her statements about the necessary connection between vice and misery. However, notice also the interpretation she gives of her current position. It is a position in which all moral values have been surrendered, in which there can be no feasible expression of honour. Staying with the 'wicked old Lord' is dishonourable, but to leave him would be to break faith, and so that, too, would be dishonourable. Thus, as Roxana understands things, her life is one in which no morally positive action is possible. As in the picaresque novel, moral concepts seem to have been rendered redundant. But unlike the picaresque novel, Defoe's fiction includes a narrator who is deeply disturbed by the apparent redundancy of moral concepts.

From this point onwards in the book, Roxana declines steadily. Once she has turned down the Dutch merchant's offer of marriage (which, incidentally, is quite acceptable, since Roxana has news of her first husband's death), she is doomed to a life of continued wickedness. In her decline, she is accompanied not only by Amy, but by another major secondary character, the 'Quaker'. This very untypical Quaker encourages Roxana in her wickedness, rather like Moll's 'Governess' or the figure of William Walters in Captain Singleton. However, interesting though she is, the 'Quaker', is much less important than the renewed force of Amy. In the earliest parts of the novel, Roxana saw Amy as an agent of the Devil (Rox, p. 38). Later, she changes her views and sees Amy as a victim of her own evil ways, and blames herself for corrupting her (Rox, p. 46). As the book continues, Amy comes more and more to represent the evil forces at work. It is always Amy who expresses the most cynical statements. When Roxana sends her to inquire after a suitor, she comes back with the news that 'he was poor, and not worth looking after' (Rox, p. 231). Amy, indeed, becomes much more like the conventional picaresque as servant. In her life as a servant, she is more acutely aware than Roxana is of the economic urgencies. She also co-operates with her mistress to help secure her own safety and security, and to maintain their mutually false positions. Whether or not Roxana's final view of Amy as the Devil's temptress is fair

---

28. Jane Jack says that this line, 'For HONESTY and HONOUR are the same', is Defoe's. If so, of course, it is an anachronism in the novel. See Rox, p. 201n.

is left largely undecided. What is certain, and is very important for any overall interpretation of the book, is Amy's major role in the ending.

The ending of Roxana has been the subject of prolonged critical debate. What actually happens is that a forgotten daughter of Roxana's, Susan by name, reappears. Since Roxana is in disguise, Susan poses a threat to her safety, by being able to reveal her true identity. Though the events are left rather unclear, it is most likely that Amy has Susan murdered, and that this event is thought to bring about Roxana's downfall. During Susan's appearances in the book, Roxana stresses the power of Amy more and more. There is even some confusion of identity, with Susan believing Amy to be her mother (Rox, p. 269). Roxana's position is frightening, and the emblematic nature of events is striking. The two characters who surround the heroine are representatives of different aspects of her. Susan represents what she once was - young, innocent, and at the mercy of the world. Amy, on the other hand, represents what she has become - cynical, worldly and evil.

In terms of policy and cynicism, Amy now takes over, and Roxana cannot control the outcome of events. Amy's casual decision to do away with Susan horrifies the narrator,

Amy was so provok'd, that she told  
me, in short, she began to think it  
wou'd be absolutely necessary to  
murder her: That Expression fill'd  
me with Horror; all my Blood ran  
chill in my Veins, and a Fit of  
trembling seiz'd me, that I cou'd  
not speak a goodwhile; at last,  
What is the Devil in you Amy, said I?  
(Rox, p. 270)

Despite her outrage and horror, Roxana recognises a kind of virtue in Amy's proposal - 'it was all of it the Effect of her Excess of Affection and Fidelity to me' (Rox, p. 271). We are reminded again here of Roxana's feeling of responsibility for Amy's fate. Her feeling is that she seems to have set in motion a train of evil which she is unable properly to control. It is this sense of responsibility (and the consequent culpability) that frightens her most. Amy's suggestion would be, for the pizaro, the most sensible way out of a difficult dilemma, though it is worth pointing out that none of the pizaros was ever placed in an analogous situation. None of the pizaros actually did commit murder, but there is no reason to suppose that they would have been horrified by the prospect. Here, though, for the first time, Roxana's retrospective sense of shame is matched by her contemporary sense of horror. At last, we have come to the episode which has dominated Roxana's view of the earlier events.

The reappearance of Susan is a strange device. As M.E. Novak says, 'That Roxana's misery arises from one of her few good actions is not without irony'.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, unlike Moll, Roxana has shown care towards both her legitimate and illegitimate children, and that one of them should reappear as a threat is certainly dramatically ironic. It reveals to us more of the moral complexity of Roxana's life. Like her problems about honour, or the problem about Amy's fidelity, this incident shows how, in a wayward world, good thinking or good intentions can lead to further dangers and depravities. With Roxana, we can never declare the heroine to be hypocritical or lenient with herself, as we clearly could with Moll. Rather, we see that Roxana is, if anything, somewhat too strict with herself throughout, and only now do we come to understand the basis for her self-recrimination. By now, she seems to be a victim rather than a protagonist. She is at the mercy of her past deeds, and they all seem to be conspiring to create her downfall. The reappearance of Susan shows that things could have turned out well, but by a combination of wilfulness and mischance, the reappearance spells disaster. Mention was made earlier to the lines in The True-Born Englishman describing the national characteristics of the French, including Roxana. Even more apposite are the two lines which come immediately after,

Prompt the Infernal Dictates to obey  
And in Hell's Favour none more great  
than they. 30

What is startling about the book is the way its ending dramatically confirms its heroine's pessimism, which we have been seeing as inappropriate all through the earlier parts of the tale.

Roxana's self-reproaches have seemed to be excessive, particularly those concerned with her decision to sleep with her landlord. The obvious inaccuracy of her statements, especially those about misery and sinning, make her seem like a very fallible commentator, just as Crusoe and Moll were. However, all this is reversed by the ending, which offers us dramatic confirmation of the misery of Roxana. The book's final paragraph is an extraordinarily truncated summary of Roxana's later career,

Here, after some few Years of  
flourishing, and outwardly happy  
Circumstances, I fell into a  
dreadful Course of Calamities, and  
Amy also; the very Reverse of our  
former Good Days; the Blast of  
Heaven seem'd to follow the Injury

29. Novak, 'Crime and Punishment in Roxana', p. 454

30. The True-Born Englishman, in Selected Poetry and Prose of Daniel Defoe, ed. Shugrue, p. 46.

done the poor Girl, by us both;  
and I was brought so low again,  
that my Repentance seem'd to be  
only the Consequence of my Misery,  
as my Misery was of my Crime.

(Rox, pp. 329-330)

The narrative ends with these words. We are given no indication of what actually took place, or of what is meant by 'the Blast of Heaven'.

As has already been said, this truncated conclusion has divided critical opinion. It is certainly very different from the endings of Defoe's other fictions, all of which leave their narrators in positions of stability. The earlier novels do end rather swiftly and abruptly, without any moralising summary, or any conclusions being offered. Crusoe closed with the narrator promising to tell us of his farther adventures and blithely mentioning his marriage in passing. Moll ended with the narrator telling us, albeit unconvincingly, that she has undertaken a life of 'sincere Penitence' in England again. This suggestion we already know to be false, from the information given in the preface. Singleton simply stops, and Jack ends with its hero happy and contented in matrimony and comfort. So even if the endings of the other novels are rather perfunctory, they all adopt a pattern from which Roxana deviates radically. As one critic puts it, 'If Roxana were like Defoe's earlier novels, Roxana's marriage to the Dutch merchant would serve as a suitable conclusion'.<sup>31</sup> Roxana shares with the other novels its abruptness, but the difference is that it states abruptly a view which changes fundamentally our attitude towards its heroine.

One way of accounting for this odd ending is to attribute it to Defoe's technical naiveté. A.D. McKillop claims that Defoe 'shies away from a situation that would naturally force him to follow a tightly constructed story through to the end'.<sup>32</sup> In essential agreement with McKillop, Bonamy Dobrée sees this ending as a revelation of the limitations of Defoe's technique - 'had he been able to carry it through, it might have constituted another step forward in the art; but he abandoned it, feeling perhaps that he was faced with a technical problem, as well as a moral one, that he could not solve'.<sup>33</sup> It is most likely true that Defoe was unable to continue, and that there would be room in the material for expansion. Yet the ending as it stands seems as satisfactory as, if not even better

---

31. Robert D. Hume, 'The Conclusion of Defoe's Roxana,' p. 483.

32. Alan D. McKillop, The Early Masters of English Fiction, p. 37.

33. Bonamy Dobrée, English Literature in the Early Eighteenth Century (Oxford, 1959), p. 425. The critical debate is summarised by Hume, op. cit., pp. 487-8. See also Jane Jack (ed.), Roxana, p. xi.



than, the endings of the other novels. Our whole response to the novel depends on the distance between us and the narrator, provided by the way we doubt her accuracy. The ending, however, confirms her judgment, and its abruptness leaves the final statements unquestionable.

Overall, the book is very pessimistic indeed. It shows us a world as chaotic, mercenary and corrupt as the world of any picaresque novel. In this world, there is no indication at all that virtue will be rewarded, and even evidence that virtue will not secure survival. Yet it is not a world devoid of spiritual values. As in Moll, there is the possibility of emotional attachment, and the early speeches on charity show some sense of over-riding merit and reward. The fact that these are expressed in characteristically mercenary terms does not alter the fact that they pay homage to some values beyond the purely mercenary. Later, too, we see the possibilities of a religious sense in the prince's anguished repentance, which comes too late to save his wife, and in Roxana's own lamentations about evil. However, in her case, she sees no way out. She seems to be simultaneously blaming herself for a lack of penitence and realising that she is helplessly committed to sin. There is an interesting passage from Serious Reflections which seems to describe her life accurately,

There is an inconsiderate temper which reigns in our minds, that hurries us down the stream of our affections by a kind of involuntary agency, and makes us do a thousand things, in the doing of which we propose nothing to ourselves but an immediate subjection to our will, that is to say, our passion, even without the concurrence of our understandings, and of which we can give very little account after it is done. 34

Throughout Roxana, we see this characteristic combination of wilfulness and involuntariness. Roxana never seems to be fully in control of her own inclinations, which may for Defoe be typically French, yet even so she is held responsible for her behaviour. The world in which she lives is thus a very bleak one where virtue cannot survive, but where even necessary vice leads to misery.

Interpretation of the book's ending is made more difficult by the ambiguities of the syntax. When she says, 'my Repentance seem'd to be only the Consequence of my Misery, as my Misery was of my Crime,' it is hard to understand the meaning of 'only'. She seems to be suggesting

---

34. Quoted by Martin Price, To the Palace of Wisdom: Studies in Order and Energy from Dryden to Blake (London, 1964), p. 268.



that she was brought so low that repentance was the only possibility, but yet to be being rather dismissive of that repentance. It is most likely that she is suggesting her repentance was genuine enough, but scarcely a source of comfort. The sense that repentance is the last, most miserable option, seems to be a very bleak religious view. It is certainly very different from the comparatively light-hearted repentances of Crusoe and Moll. Roxana is forced to castigate her sins, without seeing any genuine possibilities of redemption.

That is why the book may profitably be compared with the picaresque novel. It shows the same awareness of economic urgency, and shows also how the narrator must struggle by fraudulent means to survive. Yet, in Roxana the struggle against hardship is maintained far longer than is necessary, and leads to the eventual downfall of the narrator. Though Roxana comes from a very different background to the pizaro, and is very differently equipped, she very quickly learns the same lessons as he did. However, by setting this within a stringently religious context, Defoe leads us to see his narrator as something very unlike the pizaro. During the narrative, we are inclined to believe that she is being over-severe. Her original whoring seems less damning than she thinks, and her subsequent absolutism seems like misinterpretation. Similarly, we see here, as we did in the picaresque novel, that a life of crime is the most reliable means of securing comfort and social status. However, this comfort and security is bought at great expense, and is only fleeting. The final reversal confirms everything the narrator has said and leads to an impressively unified bleak view of life.

The sudden and truncated ending is justified by the dramatic appropriateness of its revelation. For the reader coming to Roxana after Crusoe and Moll, such a sudden reversal is startling, but it is also unifying. For the first time in Defoe, the narrator is properly understanding her life, and the helpless position she has held throughout. As with the editor of the preface to Moll, Roxana is very much at the mercy of her own story. It has all happened and there is nothing she can do to change it. All she can do is endure the consequences. The mysteries that remain may well be seen as failings in Defoe's <sup>analysis of</sup> motives at vital moments - for instance, do we ever discover why Roxana puts Amy to bed with her own lover? However, by the time of his last novel, Defoe seems to have arrived at a form whereby the failings in narrative handling are part of our understanding of the narrator.

It looks eventually as though both 'realism' and 'picaresque'

have to be treated very carefully in discussion of Defoe's fiction. Each of his novels is realistic in the accumulation of circumstantial detail, in the way the economic sense is all-pervasive, and in the partial dependability of the narrators. However, he moves away from realism when we cease to see his characters as accurate observers, and we saw how important this was in understanding Moll and Roxana. Once we see them ceasing to present allegedly neutral reports of a recognisable world, and beginning to misunderstand their experience, then the books are ceasing to be realistic. Defoe's fiction is picaresque in that it deals with a perennially hostile and estranging environment, against which the narrators have to struggle. However, he conceives of his narrators as something other than pícaros. Crusoe is too devout, Moll too <sup>st</sup>innocent and Roxana too self-reproachful for any of them to be properly called pícaros. The two terms have still been very useful within the discussion so far. By using them, we have been able to isolate certain features of Defoe's fiction which might otherwise be inaccessible. However, neither of the terms is fully adequate, and to use them as though they were fair descriptions of Defoe's work, as so many critics have done, is both inappropriate and misleading. Roxana is a very interesting and important fiction, but its interest and importance does not have much to do with the development of picaresque fiction in England.

## CONCLUSION

The two critical terms under discussion have now been analysed, and Defoe's major novels have been looked at in their light. What conclusions may be drawn? Most obviously, we have seen how difficult it is to apply the terms 'realistic' and 'picaresque', in any thorough or sustained way, to Defoe's work. The term 'realism' proved very difficult to define, due to its normative uses, and to its remarkable variety of meanings. It should not surprise us, then, that Defoe's fiction cannot readily be called realistic. First of all, we saw that 'realism' was not a term in eighteenth-century usage, and so applying it to Defoe brings in all the problems of post-ascription. In this case, the values of hindsight are mostly unhelpful. We may profitably contrast Defoe's fiction with the literary forms of idealisation, like the romance or the fable, but this contrast cannot be carried too far. By emphasising the realism of Defoe's work, we may lose sight of its emblematic nature, its symbolic qualities, and its stylisation. In the analyses of the novels, we saw Defoe making symbolic use of naming, for instance, or of the secondary characters like Crusoe's brothers. These cannot be seen as realistic devices, as their obvious patterning breaks with the semblance of verisimilitude enjoyed by the realistic work.

When Ian Watt defines his 'formal realism', he offers some suggestions which are relevant here:

Formal realism, in fact, is the narrative embodiment of a premise that Defoe and Richardson accepted very literally, but which is implicit in the novel form in general: the premise, or primary convention, that the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience, and is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its reader with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of the times and places of their actions, details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language than is common in other literary forms. 1

In Defoe's fiction, the question of the individuality of the narrators is certainly of great importance. In Moll, we saw that the idiosyncracies of Moll herself were the central interest of the narrative -

---

1. The Rise of the Novel, p. 33.

it was Moll's curious innocence, and her self-justification which gave the book its important personal quality. Similarly, the narrative of Roxana depends on the heroine's very individual response to her circumstances. She is not meant as a representative human figure (as perhaps Crusoe is), but as a fallible and even eccentric individual. So, in this case, Defoe can be called realistic. But does he fully deserve Watt's description? Reservations can surely be held when Watt talks so blithely of 'referential language'. What is this kind of language? And does Defoe present his texts through it?

It is true that Defoe asks us to accept the world of his fictions as the world we might live in as readers. However, his language does not always, and could not always, simply refer to that world. Watt seems unaware of the philosophical difficulties involved in such an easy use of 'refer'. More to the point, Defoe's language is clearly more stylised and personal than this apparently neutral reportage. The discussion so far has been designed to show Defoe's fiction as evolving away from any attempt to refer to the external world. Crusoe was seen to be thematically confused, on account of its uncertain handling of the external world. The narrator never fully committed himself to a providential view of the world, and so his narration was referentially confused. In Moll and Roxana, Defoe moves away from fiction which analyses (neutrally) an external world, to fiction which dramatises an internal world. It may still be possible to call Defoe's language 'referential', but it is not fully referring to what Watt calls the 'spatial and temporal environment' (p. 33) of individual experience.

The danger of calling Defoe's fiction realistic is that it forces the materialist view of the world to be the most important one within the books. This leads to many unhelpful readings. It forces us, for example, to dismiss Crusoe's religion as a sham - to see it as, in Marxist terms, a false consciousness. Crusoe's religion, in this case, becomes an understandable rationalisation of his economic position. Crusoe may not understand this, but alert readers can see it easily. Though there is something to be said for such a reading, the main danger is that it explains his religion away, and we cannot thus give it the weight it deserves. Whether we can, retrospectively, dismiss his religion is not really the point. The point is that Crusoe does not dismiss it, and that only very rarely does Defoe point out its inadequacies. Also, if the fiction is realistic, we are forced to

trust the narrators more than now seems appropriate. Moll tries to deceive us, and succeeds in deceiving herself, in her narration. Her view is not to be taken as authoritative or neutral, but as personal and fallible.

So Watt's idea of 'formal realism' has been shown to be of little use in discussing Defoe. Its assumptions may be accurate, but they are not the best ways to understand the artistry of Defoe at all. Defoe has often been praised for his realism, but that praise has been of the faint, dammatory kind. As one recent writer puts it '...we encounter a recognition of the realist's paradoxical situation: that one hundred per cent success in creating an illusion of reality is a kind of failure, in that it denies him a kind of artistry.'<sup>2</sup> Defoe's fiction never achieves this complete illusion of reality, since Defoe intrudes symbolic meaning and psychological significance more often than he has previously been thought to. It may be only in his last fiction that he gets beyond the confusions of trying to combine realism and a more emblematic approach. However, the fact that he does do so, even if only then, makes his fiction more complex than the term 'realism' allows.

It is the variability of Defoe's achievement which both 'realism' and 'picaresque' obscure. Defoe's work is more complex than a simple fictionalisation of apparent facts. His work has thematic complexity, and technical dexterity. However, its themes are not those of the picaresque novel. We saw that the picaresque novel was designed to reveal the sordid and competitive nature of the world, and to usurp the conventions of the romance. None of Defoe's novels could be seen as such a single-minded and unified endeavour as this. The world of Crusoe seemed, on occasions, to be much more benevolent than the world of the picaresque. So it was too with Moll and Roxana. In Defoe's novels, there always seems to be some hope that things might improve, even if, as in Roxana, that hope proves vain. As well as this thematic difference, there is great difference in the status of the narrator. The pizaro was delinquent and shameless about his experiences. Crusoe is not delinquent; Moll is never as brazen as the pizaro; and Roxana is genuinely ashamed. So it seems as though Defoe's fiction cannot profitably be called 'picaresque'.

---

2. David Lodge, The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature (London, 1977), p. 33.



However, the investigation has shed light on some of the critical problems surrounding Defoe's work. Even the fact that we can say his fiction is not picaresque is an advance of some sorts. More importantly, though, we can now see more clearly the relationship within individual works of the realistic and symbolic. We may see more clearly the role of jeopardy in Crusoe, where, as in the picaresque novel, the narrator undergoes suffering and hardship which endangers him. The world in Crusoe initially appears as hostile and imperilling, and the fortuitious deliverance of the narrator never fully removes that impression. In Moll, also, we have been assisted to see the narrator's reactions to danger. As in the picaresque, she is mistreated, and has to compete for scarce resources in whatever way she can. However, very differently from the picaresque, Defoe introduces love into the book, and leaves his heroine with an innocence and naiveté which is most unusual. Each of these books then differs from the picaresque in either its theme or its form, or in both.

The most important conclusion to be drawn concerns the relative status of Roxana. Instead of being seen as a kind of after-thought, or appendix, to Defoe's fiction, it is now to be seen as his major achievement. For historical reasons, we may still want to give predominance to Crusoe. That book was the first of his works, and even in its confusions remains most interesting. But Roxana is clearly the more unified and satisfying text. Not everyone would agree to this. In most of the standard histories of the English novel, Roxana is either overlooked completely, or dismissed slightly. The reasons for such treatment have already been discussed. However, in the way the book triumphs over the thematic confusions of Crusoe, and in its consistency of purpose, it seems a much more careful and skilful narrative than the earlier books.

What is so exciting about Roxana is the way it transforms the earlier thematic confusion into the confusion of the narrator. That is to say, the book succeeds because of Defoe's achievement of distance from his narrator. Roxana's view of her life seems excessive throughout her narration, then is dramatically and abruptly confirmed by the ending. That Defoe's last fiction should be very different in form and achievement from his earlier works should not surprise us too greatly. As readers of eighteenth-century fiction, we will be aware of similar experimentation in the final novels of Fielding and Smollett. But though we should not

be surprised unduly by Defoe's inconsistency, we should try to find some critical terminology which allows us to describe it adequately. It is this inconsistency which makes 'realism' and 'picaresque' of little use. And the same would apply to other general terms just as well. Defoe's fiction does not fit easily into one specific scheme (such as 'picaresque'), because it varies so much in achievement.

There are certainly superficial similarities in the presentation of all the novels - the first-person narration being the most striking. However, that similarity, as well as the less major similarities, should not lead us to overlook the variability of the forms employed by Defoe. The social worlds of the books are all very different for one thing - the island in Crusoe; the London underworld and Newgate in Moll; and the Court in Roxana. So too the characters of the narrators are different - Crusoe's despair and practicality combined; Moll's rather petulant innocence; Roxana's anguish and horror. If we are to be faithful to these variances, we need to find a more flexible critical vocabulary than has hitherto been employed. Even if Defoe's recurrent concern with commerce, or with salvation, can be traced in different books, criticism which is only concerned with the recurrences is bound to be very limited. The understanding of Defoe as novelist has been severely hampered by such critical inflexibility. The paradox seems to be that such terms as 'realism' and 'picaresque' are only useful if they are very precisely defined. Yet if they are so precisely defined, they can be of only very limited critical use.

This problem is not confined to the two terms I have chosen, nor to the discussion of Defoe. Instead of these terms, others could have been employed, like 'romance', 'roman à clef', even 'novel' itself. In each case, the understanding of the individual works would have been equally likely to have been submerged under the flood of definitions and qualifications needed before the term was of any critical use. The problem lies essentially in the search for consistency, which becomes reductive. Instead of pursuing an intensive empirical inquiry into the texts, critics have far too frequently gone in search of something in them. Richetti, for example, seeks in Defoe 'energies that historical and biographical studies of his work did not fully explain.'<sup>3</sup>

---

3. Defoe's Narratives, p. vii.

He dutifully and assiduously pursues these energies, and classifies them carefully. However, much of his discussion of the novels is unhelpful and restricted by the critical equipment he brings to bear. By seeking these 'energies' he eventually reduces the entire books to just such 'energies'. Eventually, his analysis is as reductive as Watt's, and though it has moments of penetration, it is hampered by the limitations of its overall conceptual structure.<sup>4</sup>

In the present examination of the novels, I have tried to avoid the tendency to reduction. The terms 'realism' and 'picaresque' are fitting in that they open out the study of Defoe, rather than narrowing it down. We may isolate those elements of his fiction which can be called picaresque, but in doing so we cannot forget that only a small part of the fiction has been isolated - much remains to be said. The status of the terms then becomes tactical. It is their partial adequacy which is important, not their completeness. The pursuit of some term which will be wholly and uncontroversially adequate has dogged Defoe criticism for too long. We may remember Dr. Johnson's remark that Defoe had written 'so variously and so well'.<sup>5</sup> We cannot avoid the variety of Defoe's work, and we should not try to ignore it. No single critical stance has so far described this variety adequately, and none seems likely to. Unless we encompass Defoe's variousness, we will be in no position to assess him.

In making this plea for a pluralistic, empirical study of Defoe, I am not denying the need to make general statements about him. It is still necessary to understand the more general matters like Defoe's role in the development of the novel, or his status as an eighteenth-century writer, or the reasons for his popularity. However, before such questions can be answered, we need to examine much more carefully and fully the individual texts. The kind of study I am advocating here has been undertaken, in another discipline, by E.P. Thompson. In his Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act (London, 1975), Thompson engages in what he calls 'an experiment in historiography' (p. 15). He tries to study, as closely as possible, one specific piece of legislation, and then from

---

4. The same reductive tendency can be found in David Blewett, Defoe's Art of Fiction (Toronto, 1979), though here the object sought is Defoe's 'vision'. I have tried to show that Defoe's vision changes, and that it is inadequate to claim a consistency within his 'vision'.

5. Quoted in Rogers, Critical Heritage, p. 58.

198

that analysis to construct more general conclusions about the role of law in eighteenth-century society, amongst other things. Similarly, in Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason (London, 1967), Michel Foucault arrives at his conclusions about eighteenth-century society by means of the extended analysis of the single issue of madness. The sustained treatment of one issue leads to the awareness of its relation to the larger social organisation of the time, and so facilitates and stimulates discussion.

In literary discourse, such sustained and profitable analysis is very rare. The sustained analyses of Richetti, Blewett, and the preceeding pages of this study may have their points of penetration, and may fulfil the aims they set out with, but they are essentially preliminary. Nearer to the kind of analysis required is that carried on by Pat Rogers in his Robinson Crusoe (London, 1979). Here, the available textual and critical vocabulary is employed to come to a fuller understanding of Crusoe, which may lead on to a greater comprehension of Defoe and his status. Professor Rogers does not, in fact, go on to analyse his conclusions, and draw further inferences from them, and that is to be regretted. On the other hand, his earlier book The Augustan Vision (London, 1974) is hampered by the lack of specificity, and the absence of sustained, empirical analysis.

What is being sought is the use of specific literary vocabulary as the way into a wider and more provocative analysis. In the present study, two terms from the received critical vocabulary have been examined closely, and have been used tactically to draw forth some of the concealed qualities of Defoe's fiction. This has led to a revaluation of Defoe's achievement, with a development being discerned, culminating in Roxana. Such an analysis allows us to answer some of the questions which were raised at the outset. We saw earlier how an editor of Crusoe claimed that no agreement had been reached on 'the central questions of Defoe's basic sincerity, exact intentions and achievement in the book'.<sup>6</sup> In the light of the preceding analysis, we may be no nearer to answering these specific questions, but we are in a position to doubt whether these are the central questions. The question of sincerity is very complex, and it is hard to see what kind of information could be unearthed to solve it. Even if we were to discover a letter from Defoe, carefully listing his intentions in Crusoe, how could we tell that the letter was sincere? Would we then need to unearth a second letter confirming the first? Following an infinite

---

6. RC, ed. J.D. Crowley, p. viii.

regression is not likely to be a critically useful pursuit. So too with the question of intention, though that search may be more informative.

It is with the question of achievement that the preceding pages have been most concerned. As is apparent, Defoe's achievement seems to me to be substantial. Yet even that is not the most central question. The most central question is surely what makes Defoe worthy of study - in what ways is he interesting? Many answers are possible. Watt, McKillop, Rogers, Richetti and Blewett, and all the other critics discussed earlier, offer various answers to this most provocative question. The present study sees Defoe's interest as lying in his development, in his refinement of technique, and in his increasing sophistication. Defoe's interest does not lie in his realism, nor in his adaptation of the picaresque novel. However, by using these terms to examine his fiction, the true nature of his interest has become more apparent.



Bibliography of Works by Defoe Consulted

A True Collection of the Writings of the Author of the True Born Englishman (London, 1703).

A Second Volume of the Writings of the Author of the True Born Englishman (London, 1705).

Romances and Narratives by Daniel Defoe, ed. G. A. Aitken (16 vols., London, 1895).

Selected Poetry and Prose of Daniel Defoe, ed. M. F. Shugrue (New York, 1968).

Selected Writings of Daniel Defoe, ed. J. T. Boulton (Cambridge, 1975).

The Versatile Defoe: An Anthology of Uncollected writings by Daniel Defoe, ed. Laura Ann Curtis (London, 1979).

The True-Born Englishman: A Satyr (tenth ed., London, 1701).

A Hymn to the Pillory (London, 1702).

The Mock-Mourners: A Satyr (London, 1702).

The Storm; or, A Collection of the Most Remarkable Casualties and Disasters which happen'd in the Late Dreadful Tempest, Both by Sea and Land (London, 1704).

An Essay on the Regulation of the Press (1704), ed. J. R. Moore (Oxford, 1948).

A True Relation of the Apparition of one Mrs. Veal (1706), Aitken ed., XV, 223-38.

An Appeal to Honour and Justice (1715), in Boulton (ed.), Selected Writings of Daniel Defoe, pp. 165-196.

A Vindication of the Press (1718), ed. O. C. Williams (Los Angeles, 1951).

The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner (1719), ed. J. D. Crowley (London, 1972).

The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe (1719), Aitken ed., II.

The King of Pyrates: Capt. Avery (1720), Aitken ed., XVI, 1-91.

The History of the Life and Adventures of Mr. Duncan Campbell (1720), Aitken ed., IV.

Memoirs of a Cavalier (1720), ed. J. T. Boulton (London, 1972).

The Life, Adventures and Piracies of the Famous Captain Singleton (1720), ed. Shiv K. Kumar (London, 1969).

Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe (1720), Aitken ed., III.

The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders (1722), ed. G. A. Starr (London, 1971).

Due Preparations for the Plague (1722), Aitken ed. XV, 11-185.

A Journal of the Plague Year (1722), ed. Louis Landa (London, 1969).

The History and Remarkable Life of the Truly Honourable Col. Jacques, Commonly Call'd Col. Jack (1722), ed. S. H. Monk (London, 1970).

The Highland Rogue (London, 1723).

A General History of the Pyrates (1724), ed. Manuel Schonhorn (London, 1972).

The Fortunate Mistress: or, A History of the Life and Vast Variety of Fortunes of Mademoiselle de Belean, Afterwards Call'd the Countess of Wintelsheim, in Germany, Being the Person Known by the Name of the Lady Roxana, in the Time of King Charles II (1724), ed. Jane Jack (London, 1964).

A Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain (1724), ed. G. D. H. Cole and D. C. Browning (1928, rev. ed., London 1974).

An Account of the Cartouchans in France (1724), Aitken ed., XVI, 93-167.

The History of the Remarkable Life of John Sheppard (1724), Aitken ed., XVI, 169-210.

A Narrative of all the Robberies, Escapes, &c. of John Sheppard (1724), Aitken ed., XVI, 211-231.

The Life of Jonathan Wild (1725), Aitken ed., XVI, 233-78.

The Adventures of Capt. John Gow (1725), Aitken ed., XVI, 279-344.

The Memoirs of an English Officer Who Serv'd in the Dutch War in 1672, to the Peace of Utrecht in 1713, by Capt. George Carleton (1728), ed. J. T. Boulton (London, 1970).

A Review of the Affairs of France <sup>etc.</sup> (1704-13), ed. A. W. Second (9 vols., in 22, New York, 1938).

# Bibliography of Primary Sources

- Aleman, Mateo, The Rogue: or, The Life of Guzman de Alfarache  
trans. James Mabbe (1623), ed. James Fitzmaurice-Kelly  
(4 vols., London, 1924).
- Anon., Lazarillo de Tormes (1554), in Two Spanish Picaresque  
Novels, trans. Michael Alpert (Harmondsworth, 1969),  
pp. 21-81.
- The Pleasaunt Historie of Lazarillo de Tormes, Drawen  
Out of Spanish by David Rouland of Anglesey (1586),  
ed. J. E. V. Crofts (Oxford, 1924).
- Apuleius, Lucius, The Golden Asse of Apuleius, trans.  
W. Aldington (1566), ed. C. Whibley (London, 1893).
- Balzac, Honoré de, Ouevres complètes de M. de Balzac  
(Paris, 1842).
- Behn, Aphra, The Works of Aphra Behn, ed. Montague Summers,  
(5 vols., London, 1915).
- Boswell, James, The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D. (1791),  
ed. R. W. Chapman and C. B. Tinker (London, 1953).
- Cervantes, Miguel de, The Adventures of Don Quixote de  
la Mancha (1605-15), trans. J. M. Cohen (Harmondsworth,  
1950).
- De Rojas, Ferdinand, Celestina: or, The Tragicke-Comedy  
of Calisto and Melibea (c. 1499), trans. James Mabbe  
(1631), ed. James Fitzmaurice-Kelly (London, 1894).
- Greene, Robert, A Notable Discoverie of Coosnage (1591),  
ed. G. B. Harrison (London, 1923).
- Grimmelshausen, H. J. C. von, Simplicissimus the Vagabond  
(1669), trans. A. T. S. Goodrick (London, 1925).
- Hazlitt, William, Complete Works, ed. P. P. Howe (21 vols.,  
London, 1930-34).
- Head, Richard, The English Rogue Described in the Life of  
Meriton Latroon (fifth ed., London, 1669).
- Le Sage, Alain René, The Adventures of Gil Blas of Santillane  
(1714), trans. Anatole Le Braz, Everyman Edition  
(2 vols., London, 1909).
- Petronius, The Satyricon, trans. J. P. Sullivan (Harmondsworth,  
1974).
- Quevedo, Francisco de, The Comical Works of Don Francisco de  
Quevedo, Author of The Visions, trans. John Stevens  
(London, 1707).
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacque, Emile, ou De L'Éducation (1762),  
ed. F. Richard and P. Richard (Paris, 1951).

Salgado, Gamini (ed.), Cony-Catchers and Bawdy Baskets: An Anthology of Elizabethan Low Life (Harmondsworth, 1972).

Scott, Sir Walter, On Novelists and Fiction, ed. Ioan Williams (London, 1968).

Smollett, Tobias, The Adventures of Roderick Random (1748), ed. Paul-Gabriel Bouce (Oxford, 1979).

Swift, Jonathan, Travels Into Several Remote Nations of the World, By Lemuel Gulliver (1726), ed. Louis Landa (London, 1965).

Zola, Émile, Oeuvres complètes, ed. H. Mitterand (15 vols., Paris, 1968).

# Bibliography of Secondary Sources

- Aithen, G. A., 'Defoe's Library,' The Athenaeum (1895), pp. 706-7.
- Alkon, Paul K., 'Defoe's Argument in The Shortest Way With Dissenters,' JP, LXXIII (1976), 817-823.
- Defoe and Fictional Time (Athens, Georgia, 1979).
- Allen, Walter, The English Novel (London, 1954).
- Six Great Novelists (London, 1955).
- Allott, Miriam (ed.), Novelists on the Novel (London, 1959).
- Alpert, Michael, Two Spanish Picaresque Novels (Harmondsworth, 1969).
- Alter, Robert, Rogue's Progress (Cambridge, Mass., 1964).
- Andersen, H. K., 'The Paradox of Trade and Morality in Defoe,' JP, XXXIX (1941), 22-47.
- Ashley, Maurice, England in the Seventeenth Century (third ed., Harmondsworth, 1961).
- Auerbach, Erich, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature (1946), trans. W. R. Trask (Princeton, N. J., 1968).
- Ayers, R. W., 'Robinson Crusoe: "allusive allegorick history",' ELI, LXXIII (1967), 399-407.
- Baine, R. M., Daniel Defoe and the Supernatural (Athens, Georgia, 1968).
- 'The Evidence from Defoe's Title Pages,' Studies in Bibliography, XXV (1972), 185-191.
- 'Roxana's Georgian Setting,' SEL, XV (1974), 459-473.
- Baker, E. A. The History of the English Novel (10 vols., London, 1934).
- Bataillon, Marcel, Le Roman picaresque (Paris, 1931).
- Becker, George J., Documents of Modern Literary Realism (Princeton, N. J., 1967).
- Benjamin, E. B., 'Symbolic Elements in Robinson Crusoe,' PQ, XXX (1951), 206-11.
- Berger, Peter L., and Luckmann, Thomas, The Social Construction of Reality (London, 1967).
- Biles, J. I., and Kropf, C. R., 'The Cleft Rock of Conversion: Robinson Crusoe and Fincher Martin,' Studies in the Literary Imagination, II (1969), 17-43.



- Bishop, Jonathan, 'Knowledge, Action, and Interpretation in Defoe's Novels,' Journal of the History of Ideas, XIII (1952), 3-16.
- Bjornson, Richard, The Picaresque Hero in European Fiction (Madison, Wisconsin, 1977).
- Blackburn, Alexander, The Myth of the Picaro (Chapel Hill, N. Carolina, 1979).
- Blewett, David, Defoe's Art of Fiction (Toronto, 1979).
- Booth, Wayne C., The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago, 1961).
- Borgerhoff, R. B. O., 'Realisme and Kindred Words: Their Use as Terms of Literary Criticism in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century,' PMLA, LIII (1938), 837-843.
- Borges, Jorge Luis, Labyrinths (Harmondsworth, 1970).
- Bouc  , Paul-Gabriel, 'Smollett's Pseudo-picaresque: A Response to Rousseau's Smollett and the Picaresque,' Studies in Burke and his Time, XIV (1972), 73-81.
- The Novels of Tobias Smollett (London, 1976).
- Boyce, Benjamin, 'The Question of Emotion in Defoe,' SP, L (1953), 45-59.
- Brooks, Douglas, 'Moll Flanders: An Interpretation,' EC, XIX (1969), 46-59.
- Form and Pattern in the Eighteenth-century Novel (London, 1975).
- Brown, Homer O., 'The Displaced Self in the Novels of Daniel Defoe,' ELH, XXXVIII (1971), 567-590.
- Bruce, Donald, Radical Doctor Smollett (London, 1964).
- Bush, Douglas, English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century, 1600-1660 (second ed., rev., Oxford, 1962).
- Chalker, John, The English Georgian (London, 1969).
- Chandler, F. W., Romances of Roguery (1899, rev., New York, 1961).
- The Literature of Roguery (1907, rev., New York, 1958).
- Churchill, R. C., English Literature of the Eighteenth Century (London, 1953).
- Cole, G. D. H., Persons and Periods (London, 1938).
- Columbus, R. R., 'Conscious Artistry in Moll Flanders,' SEL, III (1963), 415-432.
- Cross, W. L., The Development of the English Novel (New York, 1937).
- Davis, R. G., 'The Sense of the Real in English Fiction,' EL, III (1951), 200-217.

- 20
- Day, Robert A., Told in Letters: Epistolary Fiction Before Richardson (Ann Arbor, 1966).
- De la Mare, Walter, Desert Islands and Robinson Crusoe (1930, third ed., Glasgow, 1947).
- Delaney, Paul, British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century (London, 1969).
- Dobrée, Bonamy, 'Some Aspects of Defoe's Prose,' in Pope and his Contemporaries, ed. J. C. Clifford and Louis Landa (Oxford, 1949).
- English Literature in the Early Eighteenth Century (Oxford, 1959).
- Donoghue, Denis, 'The Values of Koll Flanders,' SR, LXXI (1963), 287-303.
- Donovan, R. A., The Shaping Vision: Imagination in the English Novel From Defoe to Dickens (Ithaca, 1966).
- Dottin, Paul, Daniel Defoe et ses romans (Paris, 1924).
- Downie, J. A., Robert Harley and the Press: Propaganda and Public Opinion in the Age of Swift and Defoe (Cambridge, 1979).
- Earle, Peter, The World of Defoe (London, 1976).
- Ellis, F. H. (ed.), Twentieth-century Interpretations of Robinson Crusoe (Englewood Cliffs, 1969).
- Forster, E. M., Aspects of the Novel (1927), ed. C. Stallybrass (London, 1974).
- Foucault, Michel, Madness and Civilisation (1961), trans. Richard Howard (London, 1967).
- The Order of Things (1966), English Version (London, 1970).
- Fowler, Roger (ed.), A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms (London, 1955).
- Foxon, D. F., English Verse 1700-1750 (2 vols., Cambridge, 1975).
- Genzel, D., 'Chronology in Robinson Crusoe,' PQ, XL (1961), 495-512.
- George, H. D., London Life in the Eighteenth Century (1925, reissued, Harmondsworth, 1966).
- England in Transition (1931, reissued, Harmondsworth, 1964).
- Giddings, Robert, The Tradition of Smollett (London, 1967).
- Gildon, Charles, 'Robinson Crusoe' Examined and Criticis'd (1719), ed. P. Dottin (London and Paris, 1923).
- Girdler, L., 'Defoe's Education at Newington Green Academy,' SP, L (1953), 573-591.

- Goldknopf, David, The Life of the Novel (Chicago, 1972).
- Gove, P. D., The Imaginary Voyage in Prose Fiction (London, 1961).
- Greenwood, E. B., 'Reflections on Professor Wellek's Concept of Realism,' Neophilologus, XLVI (1962), 89-96.
- Grief, L. J., 'The Conversion of Robinson Crusoe,' SEL, VI (1966), 551-574.
- Guffey, George, 'Aphra Behn's Oroonoko: Occasion and Accomplishment,' in Two English Novelists: Aphra Behn and Anthony Trollope, Papers Read at a Clark Library Seminar, May 11, 1974 (Los Angeles, 1975).
- Guillén, C., 'Towards a Definition of the Picaresque,' in his Literature as System: Essays Toward the Theory of Literary History (Princeton, 1971), pp. 71-107.
- Halewood, W. H., 'Religion and Invention in Robinson Crusoe,' EC, XIV (1964), 339-351.
- Halperin, John (ed.), The Theory of the Novel: New Essays (New York, 1974).
- Hanson, Laurence, Government and the Press 1695-1753 (1936, reissued, Oxford, 1967).
- Hardy, Barbara, The Appropriate Form (1964, corr., London, 1971).
- Hargevik, Stieg, The Disputed Assignment of Memoirs of an English Officer to Daniel Defoe (2 vols., Stockholm, 1974).
- Hatfield, H. C., 'Realism in the German Novel,' GL, III (1951), 234-252.
- Hausermann, H. H., 'Aspects of Life and Thought in Robinson Crusoe,' RES, XI (1935), 299-312, 439-456.
- Hazard, Paul, European Thought in the Eighteenth Century (1946), trans. J. L. May (Harmondsworth, 1965).
- Healey, G. H. (ed.), The Letters of Daniel Defoe (Oxford, 1955).
- Heidenreich, Helmut, The Libraries of Daniel Defoe and Phillips Farewell (Berlin, 1970).
- Hemmings, P. W. J., The Age of Realism (Harmondsworth, 1974).
- Hewitt, Douglas, The Approach to Fiction (London, 1972).
- Higdon, D. L., 'The Chronology of Holl Flanders,' English Studies, LVI (1975), 316-320.
- Time and English Fiction (London, 1977).
- Hill, Christopher, Puritanism and Revolution (London, 1958).
- Reformation to Industrial Revolution (Harmondsworth, 1969).
- Hollingsworth, Keith, The Newgate Novel, 1830-1847 (Detroit, 1963).

- Houck, Helen Phipps, 'Tabbe's Paganization of the Celestina,' PMLA, LIV (1939), 422-431.
- Hume, Martin, Spanish Influence on English Literature (London, 1905).
- Hume, R. D., 'The Ending of Defoe's Roxana: Fiasco or Tour de Force?,' Eighteenth-century Studies, III (1969), 475-490.
- Hunter, J. Paul, 'Friday as a Convert,' RBS, XIV (1963), 243-248.
- The Reluctant Pilgrim: Defoe's Emblematic Method and Quest for Form in 'Robinson Crusoe' (Baltimore, 1966).
- Jackson, Wallace, 'Roxana and the Development of Defoe's Fiction,' Studies in the Novel, VII (1975), 181-194.
- James, E. A., Daniel Defoe's Many Voices (Amsterdam, 1972).
- Jones, J. A., 'The Duality and Complexity of Guzmán de Alfarache: Some Thoughts on the Structure and Interpretation of Alema's Novel,' in Knaves and Swindlers, ed. C. J. Whitbourn (London, 1974), pp. 25-48.
- Jones, R. O., A Literary History of Spain: The Golden Age Prose and Poetry (London, 1971).
- Josipovici, Gabriel, The World and the Book (London, 1971).
- Joyce, James, Daniel Defoe (1912), trans. J. Prescott (Buffalo, 1964).
- Jusserand, J. J., The English Novel in the Time of Shakespeare, trans. E. Lee (London, 1920).
- Karl, F. R., A Reader's Guide to the Development of the English Novel in the Eighteenth Century (London, 1975).
- Kettle, Arnold, An Introduction to the English Novel (2 vols., London, 1951).
- 'In Defence of Moll Flanders,' in Of Books and Humankind ed. John Butt (London, 1964).
- 'The Precursors of Defoe: Puritanism and the Rise of the Novel,' in On the Novel, ed. B. S. Benedikt (London, 1971).
- Mooney, Howard L., 'Moll's Liddle: Defoe's Use of Irony in Moll Flanders,' BHL, XXV (1963), 377-394.
- Krier, William J., 'A Courtesy Which Grants Integrity: A Literal Reading of Moll Flanders,' BHL, XXVIII (1971), 397-411.
- Kropf, C. R., 'The Sale of Defoe's Library,' PMLA, LXX (1971), 123-133.
- Laprade, W. T., Public Opinion and Politics in Eighteenth-Century England (New York, 1936).
- Leavis, F. R., The Great Tradition (London, 1948).
- Leavis, G. D., Fiction and the Reading Public (London, 1932).

- Lee, William, Daniel Defoe: His Life and Recently Discovered Writings (3 vols., London, 1869).
- Leff, Gordon, Medieval Thought: St. Augustine to Ockham (Harmondsworth, 1970).
- Levett, A. E., 'Daniel Defoe', in The Social and Political Ideas of Some English Thinkers of the Augustan Age, ed. F. J.C. Hearnshaw (London, 1928), pp. 157-189.
- Levin, Harry, 'What is Realism?', CL, III (1951), 193-199.  
The Gates of Horn (New York, 1963).
- Lewis, C. S., English Literature of the Sixteenth Century (Oxford, 1954).
- Lewis, R. W. B., The Picaresque Saint (London, 1960).
- Lodge, David, The Modes of Modern Writing (London, 1977).
- Longaker, M., English Biography in the Eighteenth Century (1931, New York, 1971).
- Lubbock, Percy, The Craft of Fiction (London, 1921).
- Lukács, Georg, The Historical Novel (London, 1962).
- McBurney, W. H., A Check-List of English Prose Fiction 1700-1739 (Cambridge, Mass., 1960).
- 'Colonel Jacque: Defoe's Definition of the Complete English Gentleman,' SEL, II (1962), 321-336.
- MacCarthy, B. G., Women Writers: Their Contribution to the English Novel 1621-1744 (Cork, 1944).
- McKillop, Alan D., The Early Masters of English Fiction (Lawrence, 1956).
- McMaster, Juliet, 'The Equation of Love and Money in Moll Flanders,' Studies in the Novel, II (1970), 131-144.
- Macherey, Pierre, A Theory of Literary Production (1966), trans. G. Wall (London, 1978).
- Malcolmson, R. W., Popular Recreations in English Society 1700-1850 (Cambridge, 1973).
- Mannheim, Karl, Ideology and Utopia (London, 1936).
- May, T. B., 'Good and Evil in the Buccon,' ILL, XLI (1950), 319-335.
- Michie, J. A., 'The Unity of Moll Flanders,' in Knaves and Swindlers, ed. C. J. Whitbourn (London, 1974), pp. 75-93.
- Miller, Stuart, The Picaresque Novel (Cleveland, 1967).
- Minto, William, Daniel Defoe (London, 1879).
- Mish, Charles C., Short Fiction of the Seventeenth Century (New York, 1963).



Moore, J. R., 'Defoe in the Pillory' and Other Studies (Bloomington, 1939).

Daniel Defoe; Citizen of the Modern World (Chicago, 1958).

'Daniel Defoe: Precursor of Samuel Richardson,' in Restoration and Eighteenth-century Literature, ed. C. Camden (Chicago, 1963), pp. 351-371.

'Defoe and Shakespeare,' Shakespeare Quarterly, XIX (1968), 71-80.

'Defoe's Persona as Author: The Quaker's Sermon,' SEL, XI (1971), 507-516.

A Checklist of the Writings of Daniel Defoe (second ed., Hamden, Conn., 1971).

Monley, Henry, The Earlier Life and the Chief Earlier Works of Daniel Defoe (London, 1889).

Muir, Edwin, The Structure of the Novel (London, 1928).

Nylna, Vivienne, The Eighteenth-century French Novel (Manchester, 1965).

Nelson, William, 'The Boundaries of Fiction in the Renaissance: A Treaty Between Truth and Falsehood,' ELH, XXXVI (1969), 30-58.

Novak, Maximillian E., Economics and the Fiction of Daniel Defoe (Los Angeles, 1962).

Defoe and the Nature of Man (Oxford, 1963).

'Defoe's Theory of Fiction,' SP, LXI (1964), 650-658.

'Conscious Irony in Moll Flanders: Facts and Problems,' College English, XXVI (1964), 198-204.

'Crime and Punishment in Defoe's Roxana,' JEGP, LXV (1966), 445-465.

'Defoe's Use of Irony,' in The Uses of Irony, ed. M. E. Novak and H. J. Davis (Los Angeles, 1965).

'Defoe's "Indifferent Monitor": The Complexity of Moll Flanders,' Eighteenth-century Studies, III (1970), 351-366.

Parker, A. A., Literature and the Delinquent (Edinburgh, 1967).

Parker, G., 'The Allegory of Robinson Crusoe,' History, X (1925), 11-25.

Patch, H. R., The Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Literature (1927, reissued, London, 1967).

Paulson, Ronald, Satire and the Novel in Eighteenth-century England (New Haven, 1967).

Payne, W. L., Mr. Review: Daniel Defoe as Author of 'The Review' (New York, 1947).

Index to Defoe's Review (New York, 1948).

- 'Defoe in the Pamphlets,' PQ, LII (1973), 85-96.
- 'An Annotated Bibliography of Works About Daniel Defoe, 1719-1974,' Bulletin of Bibliography (1975), Parts I, II, III.
- Peterson, Spiro, 'The Matrimonial Theme of Defoe's Roxana,' PMLA, LXX(1955), 166-191.
- Piper, W. B., 'Moll Flanders as a Structure of Topics,' SEL, IX (1969), 489-502.
- Preston, John, The Created Self: The Reader's Role in Eighteenth-Century Fiction (London, 1970).
- Price, Martin, To the Palace of Wisdom (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1970).
- Priestley, J. B., Literature and Western Man (London, 1960).
- Proper, C. B. A., Social Elements in English Prose Fiction Between 1700 and 1832 (Amsterdam, 1929).
- Richetti, John, J., Popular Fiction Before Richardson: Narrative Patterns 1700-1739 (Oxford, 1969).
- Defoe's Narratives: Situations and Structures (Oxford, 1975).
- Robins, H. F., 'How Smart was Robinson Crusoe?,' PMLA, LXVII (1952), 782-789.
- Rodway, Allan, The Truths of Fiction (London, 1970).
- Rogers, Pat, Grub Street: Studies in a Subculture (London, 1972).
- Defoe: The Critical Heritage (London, 1972).
- The Augustan Vision (London, 1974).
- 'Crusoe's Home,' EC, XXIV (1974), 375-390.
- 'Moll's Memory,' English, XXIV (1975), 67-72.
- Robinson Crusoe (London, 1979).
- Ross, J. P., Swift and Defoe: A Study in Relationship (Los Angeles, 1941).
- Rousseau, G. S., 'Smollett and the Picaresque: Some Questions About a Label,' Studies in Burke and His Time, XII (1979), 1886-1905.
- Saintsbury, George, The English Novel (London, 1913).
- Schlauch, Margaret, Antecedents of the English Novel 1400-1600 (Warsaw and London, 1963).
- Schorer, Mark, 'A Study in Defoe: Moral Vision and Structural Form,' Thought, XXV (1950), 275-287.
- Scrimgeour, G. J., 'The Problem of Realism in Defoe's Captain Singleton,' ELQ, XXVII (1963), 21-33.

Secord, A. W., Studies in the Narrative Method of Defoe  
(Urbana, 1924).

Robert Drury's Journal and Other Studies (Urbana, 1961).

Sherbo, A., Studies in the Eighteenth-century English Novel  
(Michigan, 1969).

Shinagel, Michael, Daniel Defoe and Middle-Class Gentility  
(Cambridge, Mass., 1968).

Sieber, Harry, The Picaresque (London, 1977).

Skilton, David, The English Novel: Defoe to the Victorians  
(London, 1977).

Spearman, Diana, The Novel and Society (London, 1966).

Stang, Richard, The Theory of the Novel in England 1850-1870  
(New York, 1959).

Starr, G. A., Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography (Princeton, 1965).

Defoe and Casuistry (Princeton, 1971).

'Defoe's Prose Style: 1. The Language of Interpretation,'  
MLA, LXXI (1974), 277-294.

Stephen, Leslie, Hours in a Library (3 vols., London, 1892).

Stern, J. P., On Realism (London, 1973).

Stone, Lawrence, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800 (abridged and revised, Harmondsworth, 1979).

Sutherland, James, Defoe (London, 1937).

'The Relation of Defoe's Fiction to his Non-fictional Works,' in Imagined Worlds, ed. M. Mack and I. Gregor  
(London, 1968), pp. 37-51.

English Literature of the Late Seventeenth Century  
(Oxford, 1969).

Daniel Defoe: A Critical Study (Cambridge, Mass., 1971).

Swados, Harvey, 'Robinson Crusoe: The Man Alone,' in Twelve Original Essays on Great English Novels, ed. C. Shapiro  
(Detroit, 1960), pp. 1-23.

Tawney, R. H., Religion and the Rise of Capitalism (London, 1926).

Thomas, Keith, Religion and the Decline of Magic (London, 1971).

Thompson, E. P., The Making of the English Working Class (1963,  
rev. ed., Harmondsworth, 1968).

Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Poak Act (London, 1975).

Tieje, A. J., 'A Peculiar Phase of the Theory of Realism in  
Pre-Richardsonian Fiction,' PMLA, XXVIII (1913), 213-252.

The Theory of Characterisation in Prose Fiction Prior to 1740 (Minneapolis, 1916).

Tillyard, E. M. W., The Elizabethan World Picture (1943, rev., Harmondsworth, 1963).

The Epic Strain in the English Novel (London, 1958).

Tompkins, J. M. S., The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800 (London, 1932).

Trent, William P., Daniel Defoe: How to Know Him (Indianapolis, 1916).

Trevelyan, G. M., England Under Queen Anne (3 vols., London, 1930).

Ullrich, H., Robinson und Robinsonaden (Weimar, 1898).

Van Ghent, Dorothy, The English Novel: Form and Function (New York, 1953).

Watkins, Owen C., The Puritan Experience (London, 1972).

Watt, Ian, 'The Naming of Characters in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding,' RES, XXV (1949), 322-338.

'Robinson Crusoe as a Myth,' EC, I (1951), 95-119.

The Rise of the Novel (London, 1957).

'The Recent Critical Fortunes of Holl Flanders,' Eighteenth-century Studies, I (1967), 109-126.

'Serious Reflections on The Rise of the Novel,' Novel, I (1967), 205-218.

Wellek, René, 'Auerbach's Special Realism,' KR, XVI (1954), 299-307.

Concepts of Criticism, ed. S. G. Nichols (New Haven, 1963).

Whitbourn, C. J. (Ed.), Knaves and Swindlers (London, 1974).

Willey, Basil, The Eighteenth Century Background (London, 1940).

Williams, Ioan (ed.), Novel and Romance 1700-1800: A Documentary Record (London, 1970).

The Realist Novel in England (London, 1974).

Williams, Raymond, Keywords (Glasgow, 1976).

Wilson, Walter, Memoirs of the Life and Times of Daniel Defoe (London, 1830).

Wolf, Virginia, The Common Reader (London, 1929).

Zimmermann, Everett, 'Defoe and Crusoe,' ELH, XXXVIII (1971), 377-397.

Defoe and the Novel (Los Angeles, 1975).